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THERE CANNOT BE GENUINE SENSATION WITHOUT A REAL SENSED THING

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The most eminent Fr. Joseph Gredt in all his works always defends the real value of external experience and most firmly holds, that there cannot be genuine sensation without a real sensed thing, just as each properly experimental cognition is distinguished from a cognition that is not experimental insofar as it terminates in an existing or actually present thing. In other words, there cannot be experience without a thing having been experienced. Fr. Joseph Gredt says in the latest edition of his work, *Elements of Aristotelian-Thomistic Philosophy*:¹ “The truth of the cognition of the external senses demands, that the external senses immediately attain transsubjective objects both according to matter and form, and *according to presence*; therefore we know transsubjective objects by means of all of our senses. The truth of abstract cognition demands, that the intellect immediately know transsubjective objects with respect to their matter.” In the same place this doctrine is explained and defended at great length and seems to be the traditional thought [of Thomists].

Recently, however, the opposite position was proposed in a presentation at the most recent Thomistic Congress under the title: “On Sensation in St. Thomas.” In this presentation it is said:

And sensation is commonly explained by many Neo-Scholastics in this way: since the determination of a faculty is supposed to be by

Editio prima (the base for translation): “Non potest esse genuina sensatio sine reali sensato,” *Studia Anselmiana* 7–8 (1938): 189–201.

¹ *Elementa Philosophiae Aristotelico-Thomisticae*, T. II, Ed. 7 (1937), 70.

dint of the species, that which is sensed is the object in its physical *material* being, and indeed that which immediately touches the sensitive power [nervum sensitivum] . . . that afterwards, through repeated experiences and successive approximations, it is localized outside, where it is commonly believed to be present. They add that the nature of sensation is such that this would be utterly repugnant without a real sensed thing as [its] material term. For the sensation would be without an object, i.e. no sensation [at all].

I say that I could never understand sensation as explained in that fashion for the following reasons, which if I have not misunderstood, utterly exclude the notion of sensation just described.

1. . . . To know, according to the Angelic Doctor, is to *possess something immaterially*. Hence to see a tree or to hear a sound is nothing other than to possess the species of the tree or the sound in act. Hence, he who is still seeking knowledge when the species is in his possession is seeking what he already possesses.

2. Like all cognition, sensation is an *immanent act*, which is, as a whole, achieved within the one sensing. Therefore the term that it involves has to be an intrinsically immanent term . . . And so sensation does not terminate at the object in its material, physical being, but at the object in being known, i.e. at the object in a species, in [its] representation; for to step out from the species is to step out from immateriality and therefore from cognition itself . . .

But here a rather delicate question arises: just what is the species at which sensation is said to terminate? Among Thomists it is a firmly held belief that the Angelic Doctor excludes the *expressed* species from the external senses, at least as a preliminary to sensation. Therefore this is not possible unless the sense be said actually to attain its object in the *impressed* species, and this is called by Cajetan: “an intermediate image in which the object is seen” (Commentary on the *De Anima*, Book II, c. 10) . . .

Nevertheless the physical presence of an object is required *to determine* or cause the sensation through the emission of the species by which the sense is changed. But if the thing should perish after the species has been emitted, a sensation will nevertheless follow. For the sense cannot help knowing once the determination for

knowing has been received. Hence neither does a contradiction follow concerning a sensation without a real sensed thing.²

The author of this presentation does not seem to remember the many texts of St. Thomas about to be cited now, nor to recognize sufficiently that *there are many degrees of immanence*, from divine intellection all the way to the vital acts of vegetative life, as the Angelic Doctor often observes in speaking of “sensing.”³ Nor in the same place is it shown sufficiently in what manner *experimental cognition* differs from cognition that is not experimental, and *external experience* from internal [experience]. If furthermore “sense actually attains its object in the impressed species,” it reflects upon itself just as the intellect [does]. If, on the contrary, in sensation the impressed species replaces [gerit vices] the expressed species, why would it not be so *a fortiori* in intellection, since those things which exist separately in inferior things, exist in a united manner in superior things? There would be also many other difficulties that are to be considered below.⁴

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Recently, too, some others in favor of the opinion according to which sensation can obtain without a real sensed thing have cited this text of St. Thomas, in ST III, q. 76, a. 8: “Such apparition comes about in two ways (in the Eucharist), when occasionally in this sacrament flesh, or blood, or a child, is seen. Sometimes it happens on the part of the beholders, whose eyes are so affected as if they outwardly saw flesh, or blood, or a child, while no change takes place in the sacrament.”

² “De Sensatione apud S. Thomam,” *Acta Secundi Congressus Thomistici Internationalis*. (Romae 23–28 Nov. 1936), 145–148. [Following Scholastic etiquette, Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange does not mention the name of the individual he is citing, namely H. degl’Innocenti.]

³ [“sentire”]. Cf. ST I q. 27 a. 5: “Sensing is not totally removed from the genus of actions that are related to the outside, for sensing is perfected through the action of the sensible thing upon the sense” [Translation ours]. Immanence is not predicated univocally, but rather analogously, of divine operations, of our understanding, of sensation, and of the acts of vegetative life. [All translations of the *Summa*, unless otherwise noted, will be taken from the translation of the Dominican Fathers of the English Province.]

⁴ Fr. Édouard Hugon, *Philosophia Naturalis, Psychologia*, 270–273, rightly says: “The impressed species is related as the principle of sensing. But the principle of an action cannot be its end. Therefore . . . if a sense were to know its act and its species directly, then it would be reflecting upon itself; in fact, it is blocked by the [sense] organ. The opposite position paves the way to skepticism.

Moreover, if the object be present (such that sensation be a truly experimental cognition), sensation terminates at the object itself and the expressed species is superfluous.”

Those who cite this text do not explain, while those extraordinary visions are going on, in what respect *bodily vision* properly so called differs from *imaginary vision*, which exists along with an overflow in the exterior senses but without a real sensed thing. Yet this classical division, which is found in all the treatises of mystical theology, must be explained philosophically.

The Import of this Question

The present problem is of no less significance. For contrary to the thesis according to which sensation without a real sensed thing can obtain, many difficulties immediately come to mind. 1) In that case genuine sensation would not be distinguished in its proper nature from hallucination, but the latter, as Aristotle says, is related to true sensation as an echo is to a sound. 2) In the same way among the extraordinary visions, bodily vision would not be essentially distinguished from imaginary vision. 3) The metaphysical certitude of the real value of the first principles of contradiction, efficient causality, finality, etc. which is formally resolved in their intellectually evident [character], could not be further *resolved materially* within the real thing sensed, since there could be a genuine sensation without a real sensed thing. In that case the way would be opened to rational phenomenalism, as in the doctrine of Descartes, as Monsignor Francesco Olgiati⁵ has recently shown in a particularly fine way. Whence St. Thomas not infrequently insists on this material resolution, for example when he says in *De Veritate*, q. 12 a. 3 ad 2: “since the first principle of our cognition is sense, it is necessary in some way to resolve everything about which we judge to a sense. Whence the Philosopher says . . . in bk. VI, c. 8 of the *Ethics* that *the senses are of that which is ultimate [or particular] as the intellect is of principles*. He calls ultimate those things at which the resolution of the one who judges comes about.” Cf. *id.*, ad 3.

Therefore the true thought of Aristotle and St. Thomas is to be sought; namely whether for them sensation (inasmuch as it is a *properly experimental cognition* and experience, not internal but external) implies a *transcendental* or essential relation to a *real sensed thing*, namely to a really present object (or at least to its real influx into an animated organ, as in the case of stars which are no longer present where they seem to be). The sensation of vision does not indeed leave from the eye of the one see-

⁵ *La Filosofia di Descartes* (1937), v, 26, 66, 175, 176, 241, 323.

ing in the fashion of the breath of air from the mouth of the speaker, but has a transcendental relation to the real sensed thing. For if the impressed species (which would miraculously replace [gereret vices] the expressed species) has this relation, why should sensation itself not have it?

The True Position of Aristotle as Explained by St. Thomas

Now Aristotle talks about this matter in the *De Anima*, the *De Sensu et Senato*, and the *De Memoria et Reminiscentia*.

De Anima II, c. 5, lect. 10 of St. Thomas, ed. Pirota n. 350, “*Sensing is a sort of being affected.*” St. Thomas explains it thus: “For sense is a certain alteration in act, and what is altered is affected and moved.” In this way sensing is a sort of being affected in a causal sense, although it is a vital cognitive act formally speaking.

Ibid, II, c. 5, lect. 12, n. 375, “*The sense is not cognizant except of things present.*” St. Thomas: “For a person cannot sense when he wants, since he does not have sensible things in himself, but it is necessary for them to be present to him outside.” In this respect sensing differs from understanding and from imagining.

Ibid, II, c. 11, lect. 23, n. 547. That sensing is a sort of being affected is explained specifically through the relation to touch and to the tangible qualities of external bodies.

Ibid, III, c. 2, lect. 2, n. 590–594, as to these words of Aristotle: “*If then motion is both an action and a passion in that in which it is performed, it is necessary that sound and what is heard, as actual, be in that which is according to potency. For the act of what is active and motive comes about within the patient . . . The act of the sensible thing and of the sensitive power is one.*” St. Thomas explains this passage in this way, n. 590: “The act of any sense is one and the same in subject with the act of the sensible thing, but is not one in formal aspect . . . Since that which is able to hear has its operation and what is able to sound has [its] sounding, then *sound according to act*, which is called *sounding*, and *hearing according to act*, which is called *hearing*, will come into being at the same time^{*} . . . And as has been said in *Physics*, bk. III, c. 3, that *action and passion are one act in subject*, but differ in formal aspect, inasmuch as action is signified as [performed] *by the agent*, passion however as *in the*

^{*} [*sonus* is to *sonatio* as *auditus* is to *auditio*. The English word “hearing” is used here for both *auditus* and *auditio*.]

patient, he spoke in such fashion that the act of the sensible thing and the sensing [power] is the same in subject, but not in formal aspect. Therefore the act of that which produces the sound or [that] of the sound is *sounding*, whereas the act of the hearer is *hearing* . . . but in some sensible things and sensing [powers] each of the two acts has a [distinct] name, both that of the sensible thing, e.g. sounding, and that of the sensitive [power], e.g. hearing. In some cases, however, only one gets a name, i.e. the act of the sensitive [power]: for the act of sight is called vision, but the act of the color is not named.”

Hence just as there cannot be hearing without sounding, neither can there be in the other external senses a genuine sensation (distinct from hallucination) without a real sensed thing.

The same doctrine is found in *De Sensu et Sensato*, c. 1, lect. 1, n. 11: “Sense according to its proper formal aspect is not cognitive of anything except things present.” Ibid c. 1, lect. 2, n. 19: “The action of the sense comes into being in being affected.”

Again in *De Memoria et Reminiscentia* c. 1, lect. 1, n. 306: “The Philosopher shows that memory is not of something present; but this pertains to sense, through which neither the future nor the past is known, but only the present.”

Therefore the transitive action of the external thing is in that which is affected, that is to say it exists as a term in the animate organ of the sensing [agent]. And the sensation itself terminates at the thing sensed which flows into the organ, or at the real influx of this external thing.

The Position of St. Thomas in His Own Works

St. Thomas in his own works always holds that *there is no sensation except of that which is present*, namely of the present thing which is sensed, and although it is an immanent act, it apprehends the external thing to the extent that it flows into the sense organ.

In III *Sent.* dist. 14 a. 1 q. 2: Sight “comes to be in act by being affected by colors and it is assimilated to them . . . but since sense senses only in the presence of a sensible thing, the impression of its active [power] in the manner of a passion alone is sufficient for its perfect operation.” In this way an expressed species is not required in sensation, though it is indeed required in imagination and in intellection, since their object is not present or has not been proportioned to them.

Again, in IV *Sent.* dist. 49 q. 3 a. 1 q^a 2: “For a sense can only be of things present; although glorified bodies can sense at a greater distance than non-glorified bodies.”

Again, in IV *Sent.* dist. 49 q. 3 a. 1 q^a 4: “We experience delight only in things present, and so also since the exterior sense apprehends only a present thing, we are not said to rejoice with respect to it, but to be delighted. The interior sense, however, apprehends a thing whether present or absent.”

Similarly in *De Veritate* q. 25 a. 3: “Since the object of sense is a body, which is naturally able to move a sense organ, the [sensitive] powers must be diversified according to the diverse formal aspects under which movement is induced.”

In the *Summa Theologica* the same doctrine is expressed in many ways; in I q. 18 a. 3, diverse levels of immanence are laid out, [starting] from the vital action of a plant, in which one part moves another, up to the divine operations. In this way the immanence of sensation differs from that of intellection. I q. 75 a. 3: “Sensing . . . evidently accompanies some change in the body.” Cf. I q. 78 a. 3. Again, I q. 78 a. 4: The internal senses are distinguished from the external senses insofar as they apprehend a thing “even in its absence.” I q. 81 a. 3 ad 3: “the exterior senses require exterior sensible things for their actions, whereby they are affected, [things] whose presence is not in the power of reason.”*

I-II q. 15 a. 1: “it is proper to sense to take cognizance of things present,” [and] in this respect it differs from the imagination and from the intellect. I-II q. 35 a. 2 ad 2: “the external sense perceives only what is present.” I-II q. 17 a. 7 ad 3: “Since the external sensible is necessary for the apprehension of the senses, it is not in our power to apprehend anything by the senses, unless the sensible be present; which presence of the sensible is not always in our power.”

Finally, St. Thomas has spoken on several occasions concerning the *material resolution* of our intellectual awareness to a *real sensed thing*. For example, in IV *Sent.* dist. 9 q. 1 a. 4 sol. 1: “Since, therefore, each cognition of our intellect arises from the sense, there cannot be right judgment unless it be traced back to the sense.”

De Veritate q. 12 a. 3 ad 2: “Since the first principle of our cognition is the sense, it is necessary to resolve all the things about which we

* [Translation ours].

judge to the sense in some fashion . . . therefore, since in a dream the senses are bound, there cannot be a perfect judgment . . ." Again in ad 3.

Ibid q. 28 a. 3 ad 6: "In sleeping, the intellect is not kept from perceiving something either on the basis of the features which it has previously considered, or from the illumination of some superior substance . . . But perfect judgment of the intellect cannot exist in sleeping, because in that case the sense, which is the principle of our cognition, is bound."

He says the same thing in ST II-II q. 154 a. 5 ad 3.

Hence there cannot be genuine sensation, distinct from a hallucination that has arisen from preceding sensations, without a real sensed thing present.

The principal commentators of St. Thomas have understood the matter in this way. Cajetan, *In Post. Anal.* c. 13, explains it in an excellent way as follows: the intellectual certitude of the real value of the first principles of reason is indeed formally resolved in their intellectual evidence, but is resolved materially in the real sensed thing. Similarly Cajetan says on ST I q. 51 a. 2 n. 3: "Now the purely imaginary vision terminates at an object within, *whereas the vision of the eyes terminates at an extrinsic object.* And from this another difference follows: that what is seen by way of imagination, as such, exists only in the one imagining, and consequently appears to him alone. *But what is seen by the eyes, since it exists outside the one seeing, can commonly be seen by all.*" Again Cajetan on ST III q. 57 a. 6 ad 3. Cf. below.

Again John of St. Thomas, in the *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus, Logica*, q. 22 a. 4, says, "The external sense has to be borne to a thing placed outside [it]." And q. 23, a. 2: "It implies that a thing is known *by sensing and by experiencing with external sensation*, which differs from the imaginative [power], *only by attaining something external* in itself and not as formed within itself." Ibid, *Philosophia Naturalis*, on the three books of the *De Anima*, q. 6 a. 1 and 4.

Generally the commentators of St. Thomas hold the same doctrine, for example cf. the commentary on ST I q. 51 a. 2 of Bañez, the Salamanticensis, Gonet, etc.

Most modern Thomists understand this in the same way, among whom it is possible to cite Monsignor Albert Farges,⁶ Édouard Hugon,⁷

⁶ *L'Acte et la puissance* (1909), 375–401. Objections drawn from the so-called specific energy of nerves and those that arise from hallucination. "Hallucination presupposes true external perception and would not be produced without it." It is also necessary to speak of

Francis Xavier Maquart,⁸ Jacques Maritain,⁹ Paul Geny,¹⁰ Joseph de Tonquédec,¹¹ Joseph Gredt,¹² etc.

According to this doctrine immanence is not predicated univocally but analogically of sensation and of intellection. Thus it is understood why St. Thomas would have written in ST I q. 27 a. 5: “Sensing is not totally removed from the genus of actions that are related to the outside, for sensing is perfected through the action of the sensible thing upon the sense.”*

Confirmation is found in the various articles of the Angelic Doctor concerning preternatural visions and apparitions.

Concerning Extraordinary Visions

On many occasions St. Thomas treated of these visions, very nicely distinguishing bodily vision from imaginary vision and from intellectual vision. Cf. the *Tabula Aurea* of his works under the word “visio”, n. 5-16, 21.

Only the principal texts are to be referred to. At the beginning of this article, we cited the passage in ST III q. 76 a. 8, in which there is a discussion of an apparition of flesh or blood or of a boy in the Eucharist:

the facts mentioned by the partisans of the hypothesis of the specific energy of the nerves. The author cites and fully approves these words of Henri Bergson (*Matière et Mémoire*, 227, 244): “In our perception we grasp at once both a state of consciousness and a reality independent of us.” “For if action and passion are only one and the same act with two aspects, like front and back; and if the action of the agent is really in the patient, I ought immediately to grasp within the ego the action of the non-ego when it strikes me. It is therefore perfectly useless to look for the famous ‘suspended bridge,’ as it is impossible to find the philosopher’s stone. It is enough no longer to separate what nature has united: the action of the mover and the passion of the mobile thing. Thus is explained the invincible evidence that while perceiving the exterior world through the senses we perceive something other than the sensible modifications of the ego . . . it is reality itself which is grasped.”

⁷ *Cursus Phil.* T. III *Philos. Naturalis, Psychologia*, 270: “That which the sense directly perceives is not the impressed species, nor a modification of the sense, but the external sensible thing.”

⁸ *Elementa Philosophiae*, 260: “It must be said that sensation terminates at the physical object or the physical quality inasmuch as it acts upon the sense. For action is in what is affected, and in this way sensation terminates at the physical quality inasmuch as it is in the sense organ by its action.”

⁹ *Les degrés du Savoir*, 229.

¹⁰ *Critica*, where the value of sensation is discussed.

¹¹ *La Critique de la connaissance* (1929), 59 sq.

¹² *Loc. cit.*

* [Translation ours].

“Sometimes it happens on the part of the beholders, whose eyes are so affected as if they outwardly saw flesh, or blood, or a child, while no change takes place in the sacrament.” This is so when among the witnesses [of the sacrament, there is] only one who enjoys the apparition.

It is to be immediately noted that St. Thomas does not say that the witness [in question] properly sees the apparition, but rather that “his eyes are changed in such fashion *as if he were seeing*.”

Whence John of St. Thomas¹³ explains this [passage], saying: “Those external apparitions can only come about in two ways, either through eliciting an *external vision*, or through eliciting an *imaginative vision*, which thinks or judges that it sees externally inasmuch as the internally existing species descend near the sense organs, whether of the common sense or of the exterior senses, and the imagination moved by them thinks that it sees by external vision,” as in a hallucination.

In fact, in order for there to be a *genuine bodily vision*, there would have to be at least an exterior influx into a sense organ, such as the actual luminous influx of a light ray of a star no longer present. Otherwise, there is an imaginary vision with a certain overflow in the external senses, as in a hallucination, which presupposes preceding sensations, as an echo presupposes a sound. This is confirmed from many passages of the Angelic Doctor.¹⁴

For when St. Thomas speaks of bodily vision properly speaking, inasmuch as it is distinguished from imaginary vision, he always says that it terminates at an exterior body, or at least at its action upon a sense organ. Cf. ST I q. 51 a. 2, ‘whether the angels assume bodies’: “Some have maintained that the angels never assume bodies, but that all that we read in Scripture of apparitions of angels happened in prophetic vision, that is, according to imagination. But this is contrary to the intent of Scripture; for whatever is beheld in imaginary vision is only in the beholder’s imagination, and consequently is not seen by everybody . . . From all this it is clearly shown that such apparitions were beheld by *bodily vision*, whereby *the object seen exists outside the person beholding it*, and can accordingly be seen by all. Now by such a vision only a body can be beheld.” The commentators of St. Thomas generally speak in this way [when commenting] upon this article.

¹³ *Cursus Philos. Logica* q. 23 a. 2 at the end.

¹⁴ Cf. P. J. Tonquédec, *La Critique de la connaissance* (1929), 485–490. Appendice V: Hallucination, rêves et visions d’après Aristote et S. Thomas.

In the same way the Angelic Doctor in ST III q. 57 a. 6 ad 3, regarding the vision which St. Paul had about the resurrected Christ on the way to Damascus after the Ascension in Acts 9, says, “Christ by once ascending into heaven acquired for Himself and for us in perpetuity the right and worthiness of a heavenly dwelling-place; which worthiness suffers in no way, if, from some special dispensation, He sometimes comes down in body to earth; either in order to show Himself to the whole world, as at the judgment; or else to show Himself particularly to some individual, e.g. in Paul’s case, as we read in Acts 9. And lest any man may think that Christ was not bodily present when this occurred, the contrary is shown from what the Apostle says in I Cor. 15:8, to confirm faith in the Resurrection: ‘Last of all He was seen also by me, as by one born out of due time.’” Now this vision would not indeed prove the truth of the Resurrection, “unless he had beheld Christ’s very body.” Cf. the commentary of Cajetan on this article, and the commentary of St. Thomas on 1 Corinthians 15:8.

From these texts and many others like them it follows that for St. Thomas bodily vision is distinguished from imaginary vision insofar as it terminates at the very external thing which is being sensed, or at least at its real influx into a sense organ.

Concerning Sensation and Hallucination

Now to understand better the significance of this question, it is necessary to note attentively that there is an immense difference between genuine sensation and hallucination, as between *properly seeing* something real actually present and *not seeing it*, for example between seeing Christ really brought back to life and bodily present, as the Apostles and even St. Paul on the road to Damascus saw Him, and not properly seeing Him, but vividly imagining Him while He is absent. The first proves the resurrection of Christ, but not the second.

Even when not speaking about extraordinary facts, it is a question not only of the conditions of *sensation*, nor only of what is material in it, but [also] of that which is formal in its *proper essence*, which is unchangeable. It is a question of the true *nature* of genuine, normal sensation, which results from the union of an external object with a sense organ as [that object] has been created by God, and is known by [that sense organ] without any fallacy or confusion with an image produced in a hallucination. We can say to the idealist philosopher: “There are more things in heaven and earth than in all your philosophy.” For genuine sensation is much richer if

it immediately touches upon a real sensed thing than if it does not immediately touch on it. No, rather it is exactly this question which is at stake: *is it possible or contradictory properly to see that which really is not*, for example, properly to see a non-existent ray of a star and properly to hear a non-existent sound? Not even God can bring it about *that I see that which is not* and that *I touch what is not tangible*, since it does not exist. Would not the immense distance between seeing and hallucinating be destroyed, between properly seeing the brother whom many kept saying was dead and to have a hallucination about him? It is amazing that we should have to defend at such length a truth which in French is called a “*vérité de La Palisse*.”

With respect to this great difference which ought to be attentively noted, there are [still more] texts of St. Thomas on this matter that ought to be read which are duly cited by Fr. J. de Tonquédec.¹⁵

The Angelic Doctor says in *IV Sent.* dist. 44 q. 2 a. 1 sol. 3: “Others say that (in heaven) *sensing in act* will come about through a receiving, *not indeed from exterior sensibles*, but through an outflowing from higher powers, just as the higher powers now draw from the lower powers. So [in heaven], conversely, the lower [powers] will draw from the higher ones. *But that mode of reception does not make for truly sensing*, since every passive potency is determined *according to the formal character of its species* to a specific active [principle], since potency as such has an ordering to that in respect of which it is predicated. *Hence, since the active property in the exterior sense is a thing existing outside the soul, and not its intention existing in the imagination or in reason, if a sense organ should not be moved by things outside, but from the imagination or from other higher powers, it will not truly be sensing*. Hence we do not say that the insane and other mentally handicapped [people], in whom *an influx of such species to the sense organs comes about* because of the dominance of the imaginative power, *truly sense*, but rather that *it seems to them that they sense*. And so, with the others, it must be said that the sense of glorified bodies will exist through a reception from things that are outside the soul.”

Again St. Thomas in *De Potentia*, q. 3 a. 7 corp. says against the occasionalists of the Middle Ages: “they used to say that God arranged things in such a way that the present course of things would be preserved, i.e. that He would never cause heat except on contact with fire, [*but*] *not because the fire that was brought into such contact would make anything [actually]*

¹⁵ *La critique de la connaissance*, 488–490.

hot. This position, however, is *manifestly repugnant to sense*: for *since one does not perceive a sensed thing unless one is affected by a sensible thing*, it follows that *a man does not sense the heat of a fire if the likeness of the heat of the fire in a sense organ does not exist through the fire acting [on it]*. For if that species of heat in the organ were brought about by some other agent, then even though [the sense of] touch might sense heat,¹⁶ *nevertheless it would not be sensing the heat of a fire, nor would it sense that the fire is hot*, even though the sense, whose judgment does not err in the [case of its] proper sensible [object], judges this [to be so].”

The same doctrine is found in the *De Malo*¹⁷ and in the *Summa Theologica*.¹⁸

¹⁶ For God can produce an exterior influx similar to fire, at which point heat would be sensed. If however there were no external influx, then there would not be a true sensation, but an apparent sensation, as was said in the text of *IV Sent.* cited immediately before.

¹⁷ *De Malo* q. 3 a. 3 ad 9: “That the *species or likenesses of things* are not distinguished from the *things themselves*, comes about because the higher power, which is capable of judging and distinguishing [them], is bound . . . as in the case of the mentally ill.”

De Malo q. 16 a. 11 corp.: “In chapter 3 of *On Sleeping and Waking*, the Philosopher, assigning the cause of the appearance of dreams, says that whenever an animal is sleeping, when a lot of blood descends to the sensitive principle, *there descend at the same time motions or left over impressions* from the motions of sensible things that are preserved in the sensible spirits and move the apprehensive principle in such fashion that *some things appear as if at that point the sensitive principle were being changed by the exterior things themselves*. And this is how demons are able to change the imagination and sense, not only of those sleeping, but even of those who are awake.”

¹⁸ *ST I* q. 111 a. 3 is completely the same text as in *De Malo* q. 16 a. 11, and it is added: “The disturbance of humors and spirits can be so great, that apparitions of this sort come about even in those who are awake, as is clear in the case of those who are mentally ill and the like.”

Cf. also the index of Aristotle’s works under the words: *hallucinatio, echo, eclipsis*.

For Aristotle, the definition of sensation is totally different from the definition of hallucination, and in each of the two cases we ought to proceed methodically from the nominal definition, investigating according to the laws for tracking down a definition, *the true, real definition* both of *sensation* and of *hallucination*. Hallucination, however, is related to a sensation as an echo is to a sound: for hallucination is primarily said to exist when someone thinks that he is sensing something, which others present in the same place do not sense; and then the cause of the hallucination is found, [in the same way] as the cause of an eclipse or an echo [is found], i.e. *hallucination*, be it visual, auditory, or tactile (e.g. after the amputation of a foot), *is a false sensation that has arisen from past sensations on the occasion of some disturbance or trauma of the organism*. In this way one obtains [both] the *what* and the *why* of hallucination, and one [can] explain why hallucination *exists without a real sensed thing*, while there cannot be a genuine sensation without a real, existing, sensed thing, to which it is essentially relative. This is of great importance today against idealism.

Therefore it must be concluded: just as intelligence is essentially relative to an intelligible being, knowledge [scientia] to a knowable being by abstracting from its existence, and imaginary vision to an imagined object, so proportionally *sensation is essentially relative to a real sensed object* or at least *to its real influx* into a sense organ, in such a manner that there cannot be genuine sensation distinct from hallucination and from imaginary vision without a real sensed thing.

Just as a transitive action of an external thing upon a sense organ cannot occur without the one sensing being affected, so too sensing and being sensed cannot be separated, anymore than perceiving and being perceived. And although, whatever Berkeley might say, something can be without being perceived, for example things that are in the bosom of the earth or of the sea, nevertheless *it is not possible for anything to be sensed or perceived unless it exists*, at least unless there be a real influx of it into a sense organ. “*For the act of the sensible thing and of the sensitive [power] is one [and the same], to the extent that the action of the sensible thing is ultimately in the affected sensing [power],*”^{*} as Aristotle says in *De Anima* III c. 2 (426 a 16). In this way the metaphysical certitude of the real value of first principles, [i.e.] of contradiction, of causality, [and] of finality, which is *formally* resolved in their intellectually evident [character], is *materially* resolved without any danger of subjectivism in the real sensed thing, which is the proper object of experience. As St. Thomas says in *De Veritate* q. 12 a. 3 ad 3: “The judgment of the intellect does not depend on sense in such a way that the act of the intellect [in question] is performed by a sense organ. *However, it does need the [sense] as the ultimate end-point at which [the act of judgment] is resolved.*”

In this way skepticism and idealism are avoided. Therefore, as Fr. Joseph Greth¹⁹ says very well, “it is superfluous and impossible to build a bridge to cross over from the subjective to the transsubjective . . . Many critical realists strive to infer a transsubjective world thanks to the *principle of causality* . . . But this reasoning is *impossible* owing to the manifest logical fallacy on which it is based.” For doubt remains concerning the real or ontological value of the principle of causality itself, if its certitude is not

^{*} [Only the italicized portion of the quotation is to be found in the actual text of Aristotle’s *De Anima*. It is likely that the quotation mark was extended beyond the original quotation by a typographical error.]

¹⁹ *Elementa Philosophiae*, 76.

materially resolved in a *real sensed thing*, existing not only apparently but [also] really.

This is surely the traditional thought [of Thomists], and this alone is fully coherent with the words of Aristotle and St. Thomas regarding sensation and human certitude.

**THERE CANNOT BE GENUINE SENSATION
WITHOUT A REAL SENSED THING**

SUMMARY

In this essay, Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange refutes Kantian and occasionalist notions of sensation that have been smuggled into Thomism and Catholic thought. He maintains that sensation by its very nature requires an object that is sensed, since sensation without a sensible object is no sensation at all. To defend this position, he draws upon Aristotle, St. Thomas, and the Thomistic Commentators, arguing that the opposite position not only denies the distinctions between hallucination and sensation, bodily vision and imaginary vision, but also ultimately denies that the metaphysical certitude of the first principles of reason are materially resolved in that which is sensed.

KEYWORDS: sensation, hallucination, bodily vision, imaginary vision, impressed species, expressed species.