SOME BASIC DEFINITIONS IN SCHOLASTIC PHILOSOPHY

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INTRODUCTION

In any field of knowledge there is need for a common ground of agreement to make possible a systematic study. Definition of terms helps establish this ground. This is particularly important in the realm of the Natural Sciences because of the interrelationship between them. However, since Philosophy is the queen of the sciences and furnishes the ultimate rational explanation of reality, careful accurate definition is more necessary in Philosophy than in any other field of inquiry.

This dissertation is intended to acquaint the student with some definitions essential to Philosophy, although it is not intended to be a complete glossary.

The writer has striven to give the definitions of St. Thomas Aquinas wherever it was possible. The other sources to which this work is indebted will be found in the bibliography.
Absolute

Absolute is a term meaning "the essence, wherein there is supreme unity and simplicity." (1) The absolute has its co-relative in the relative. One can know the relative in its relation to the absolute. The Absolute is God.

The term 'absolute' is used in rather obvious meanings in Logic and Epistemology.

Abstraction

Abstraction is the process whereby the mind conceives an idea. Considered in general, it is, according to St. Thomas, a mental representation of one or several elements of a things, the other elements in it not being represented, but at the same time not being excluded, even though they are not included. It is the act whereby the intellect abstracts or selects from an object that portion which is essential and neglects the accidental.

The result of this abstraction is the concept which expresses in the abstract the essence of the object. The intellect conceives what the senses perceive. Abstraction simply means the representation of the essence of an object in the intellect.

There are three degrees: the first degree required for the physical sciences relinquishes the particular and individuating notes abstracting the general essence, the second degree discovers a permanent element in all corporeal beings—extension or the element of quantity present in all bodies, which is the realm of Mathematics, and the third degree goes not only beyond both of these but also beyond intelligible matter to the ultimate reality common to all, namely, being.

Accident

A universal which is affirmed of several subjects as a qualifying contingent predicate; that which adheres in a subject. "It belongs to the definition of an accident for it to be in a subject."(2)

A predicable (logical) accident expresses the mode in which a thing is predicated of a subject, viz. adjectively and contingently. So it is opposed to 'property'.

A Predicamental accident is a being which is not subsisting but inheres in a subject. A predicamental is

(2) S.T., III, 77, 2.
that reality whose essence is such that it is fitted to exist in some subject and not in itself. So the natural aptitude for inherence is the distinguishing characteristic of an accident.

Substance and accident are in their reference to creaturely being co-relative terms.

Act

In as much as a thing is, it is in act; in as much as a thing can be, it is in potency. Act and potency are co-relative terms.

Act is divided into pure act and mixed act. God is pure act—that act which admits of no potency whatsoever. Mixed act is entitative or formal. Entitative act, act of existence, is the very being of a finite thing, i.e., it is the existence of a finite being. Formal act, act of essence, is the act by which a thing is determined and perfected in its species; v.g., substantial form. Act itself is not described in terms of potency. Potency is known in relation to act.

Action

In its widest sense, it is a kind of operation, and it is defined: any actuality of power, that is, of operative power. In this sense it is divided into immanent action, which is action in a wide sense, and transitive action, i.e., action which is destined to produce an effect. Immanant action consists wholly in its being a perfection of an agent, as his dispositions; v.g., intellect.
And again, an action is the actual exercise of an active power. It is related to potency since no action can take place in creatures without a potency being realized at the same time; it is also related to passion, since no action takes place without something able to receive and actually receiving the effect of the action.

In a creature, what a thing can do will depend on its active potency. In God, the Divine action is an action entailing no potency since God is omniscient and can do anything and can gain no perfection or lose no perfection, and while God is immutable, He is not inactive.

Analogy

Predication common to several inferiors of a name, which is accepted in different senses, in such a manner, nevertheless, that some principle warrants its common applicability. Accordingly as this principle is sought in the relations of cause and effect, proportion or proportional-ity, there are distinguished various types of analogy.

Analogy of attribution is had when the principle of unity is found in a common concept to which the inferiors are related either by cause or effect. This common concept must refer principally to a prime reality to which the inferiors are analogous. Thus food, medicine and pulse are said to be healthy. In this case the common concept is health which applies principally to the animal. Food, medicine, and pulse are related to it through the various forms of cause and effect.

Analogy of proportion is had when the principle of
unity is found in the interrelation of two concepts to themselves. This relation may be one of similitude or order. Thus being is predicated of substance and quantity, not because of their relations to a third reality which primordially contains this notion, but because of a relation both of similitude and order which they have to each other.

Analogy of proportionality is had when the principle of unity is found in an equality of proportions. This analogy is primarily used between material and spiritual realities. Thus 'sight' is predicated of occular vision and intellectual understanding.(3)

Annihilation

Annihilation is the reduction of something to nothing (4), or the act by which all actuality is withdrawn from a reality. It differs from change, which has both a 'terminus a quo' and 'terminus ad quem' since there is nothing left after the act has taken place. It is the contrary of creation.

It would be the withdrawing of the creative conserving power of God.

Appetite

A natural appetite is the inclination towards good without knowledge. Sensitive appetite is the inclination

(4) S.T., I, 104, 4.
toward good but with sense knowledge; apprehension of some particular good.

The natural appetite is the transcendental relation of a thing to a good suitable or proportionate to it. The elicited appetite is the inclination of a cognoscitive being to a good as apprehended. The rational appetite is the will.

Attribute

Anything which can be predicated of a subject is the widest sense of the term used by St. Thomas. More strictly it is a perfection that is conceived as flowing from the essence.

A transcendental attribute is one which is predicated of every being, i.e., that which results from being in as much as it is being.

Aeveternity

Aeveternity or aeveternity is the duration of a being which has a beginning but no end.

Beauty

Beauty is an attribute or property of that being which, in its parts, elements, aspects, or activities, manifests, in a manner pleasing to the mind and satisfactory to the will and the emotions, a striking resplendence of completeness and harmony, of proportion, and of balance.

The subjective factor in beauty is the manner in which
the beholder reacts to the object; i.e., his taste. The objective factors exist, and these are perfections in the beautiful object itself. These objective factors are: completeness or integrity; fulness or opulence of being which gives effectiveness; unity of parts or aspects; harmony or balance of elements; and resplendence.

St. Thomas says in the Summa (5) that it includes three conditions: integrity or perfection, since those things which are impaired, are by the very fact ugly; due proportion or harmony; and brightness or clarity, whence things are called beautiful which have a bright color.

The beautiful is defined as that which pleases when seen, i.e., known; or that whose apprehension pleases. 

a/ Formal beauty, as beauty exists in the intellect, is the vital proportion between the intellect in act and the object actually known, i.e., the complacence of the intellect by which the intellect vitally tends to an object as known and proportionate to itself. 

b/ Objective beauty, as beauty exists in reality, requires three objective conditions: integrity, due proportion, and clarity.

Beauty is related to goodness and truth as well as to unity.

(5) S.T., I, 39, 8.
Becoming

Becoming is the transition from potency to act. It is that process in which a potency receives some actuality.

Being

In its nominal sense, it is anything that is or can be actually existent. If a thing can be, it is intelligible and has a reason for its potential being. If a thing is, its intelligible essence is a/ united with its existence and this is creatural being, or b/ existence is a note of its essence, and this is Almighty God.

Being cannot be defined or properly described. It comes from the verb 'to be' which means 1/ to exist in reality, and which 2/ is a copula verb in a proposition. As a noun it signifies existence or that which is. "In one way it is considered as signifying the entity of a thing, as divisible by the ten predicaments, and in that sense it is convertible with thing, and thus no privation is a being. In another sense being conveys the truth of a proposition which unites together subject and attribute by a copula, notified by this word 'is'.(6) Descriptively, being is that whose act is existence.

Cause

Cause may be defined as the positive principle from which a thing really proceeds as regards dependence in

(6) S.T., I, 48, 3.
existence. Again, it is a principle to which something else owes its existence, or anything that contributes, in any manner whatever, to the producing of a reality.

There are four causes: the material cause is that out of which something is made; the formal cause is that which makes a thing to be precisely what it is; the efficient cause is the agent who produces the effect; and the formal cause is that to which the action of the agent tends.

The first being, God, cannot of necessity be a caused being. Finite spiritual beings have no material cause.

Composition

Composition is the contrary of simplicity and is a union of principles, parts or concepts. A metaphysical composite results from the union of things that are metaphysically distinct, e.g., essence and existence, act and potency. A physical composite is one that is made up of parts actually distinct in nature, as the union of integral parts, e.g., arms and legs of a man, or essential parts, such as matter and form. A logical composite is a composite in the mental order, such as results from the union of logical concepts, e.g., the union of the animal and rational in man.

Conscience

It is an application of knowledge to action. (7)

(7) S.T., I-II, 19, 5.
Moral conscience is an act of the intellect and is defined as the judgment of practical reason which regulates our human acts in their concrete individuality. The act of Conscience is the act of the intellect judging here and now that an action is good and to be performed, or that it is evil and must not be performed. If the intellect judges that there is no moral import, then, the action may be performed or not.

Creation

Creation signified actively means the Divine action, which is God's essence, with a relation to creatures. (8) The classical definition is 'the production of a thing from nothing of itself or a subject. Active creation signifies God's operation, which is actually His divine essence determining the being and existence of creatures which are consequently related to Him as the Creator. Creation in its passive meaning, i.e., creation in the creature, is merely a real relation (predicamental) of the creature to the creator as to the principle of its being. (9)

End

An end is that towards which an appetite tends, i.e., that for which an agent operates. The end of the agent is the reason the rational agent may have for accomplish-

(8) S.T., I, 45, 3.
(9) Ibid.
ing the work. The end of the work is that which the act accomplishes by its very nature.

Essence

Essence tells us what a thing is. It answers the question: What is the thing? Thus essence of necessity conforms to the strict definition of the nature of the reality. It gives the metaphysical constitution of the thing but does not refer to existence. For there are innumerable essences which are realities to the extent that they could be brought into existence but which have never been brought into existence as a matter of fact. It is what is expressed by the definition—which comprises the principles of the species, but not the individuating principles. In things composed of matter and form, the essences signifies not only the form nor only the matter but what is composed of matter and the common form, as principles of the species. Hypostasis and person add the individual principles to the idea of essence. (10)

The mind can see the distinction between substance, essence, and nature in concrete being. If we regard the being in its individual (in se) existence, we conceive of substance. If we regard the metaphysical characteristics of the thing, we conceive its essence. If we regard the essence as a principle of operation, we conceive the nature. Note: Nature and substance, however, are

(10) S.T., I, 29, 2.
not synonymous; neither are essence and substance since accidental have essential natures.

Eternity

According to Boethius, eternity is the "simultaneously whole and perfect possession of interminable life." It is the duration of a being with no beginning and no end. In other words, it is the duration of a thing which is immutable in its existence and operation, i.e., the duration of God.

Evil

Evil is "the privation of good," says St. Augustine. The lack or privation of a due perfection can be either physical or moral.

Physical evil is a lack of perfection that should be in a concrete nature.

Moral evil is a lack of conformity there should be between myself and the moral law.

Faculty

A faculty is the proximate principle of operation as such. It is an accident that is really distinct from the thing of which it is a property. Power and faculty are synonymous terms, but strictly, a faculty is a capacity for conscious operation, whereas a power is a capacity for any kind of operation, conscious or unconscious.

Form

That which gives matter a certain determined kind of
existence or that by which a thing is what it is, is called form. The form of a reality is that which determines its essence or nature and which is the first thing to enter into the potentiality of a thing determining its nature in existence. It is used in another sense to signify shape in reference to beauty. More commonly it is used in the sense of substantial form.

Substantial form is that principle of reality which determines a being into what it is; it makes it that reality which belongs to that certain species; it is the first act of matter or potentiality which determines a being in existence through the operation of efficient causality.

These forms can be of different grades: the forms not ordained to matter—the pure spirits, the forms made to inform matter—the human souls, and the forms entirely immersed in matter—animals, plants and inanimate objects.

Accidental form is a form that determines the being but does not determine it essentially. There are as many accidental forms as there are accidental determinations of a being.

Freedom

In its widest sense, freedom refers to some kind of immunity from necessitation. Freedom of independence is immunity from law or obligation which pertains to God alone since He alone is free from obligation, being the source of all obligation. Man enjoys this freedom only
in regard to things neither prescribed nor forbidden by law. Freedom of action is freedom from external force or violence. Psychological freedom means that in a concrete situation a rational being is not necessitated to act or to refrain from acting, or to act in one way or in another. Moral freedom means that an action can be done or abstained from when that action or abstention does not run counter to the moral law. The term moral freedom might also be used to indicate immunity from moral suasion.

Free will

In a common manner of speaking, we call free will: that which is the principle of the act by which man judges freely.\(^{11}\)

Free will is defined: the active indifference in virtue of which the will has dominative power over its own act, because it has that power over the judgment by which it is moved, in as much as it can change this judgment. Briefly, it is the power of choosing between goods proposed as desirable by a mutable judgment.\(^{12}\)

Goodness (good)

The good is that which all desire. Goodness is a transcendental attribute convertible with being, yet goodness presents the aspect of desirableness, which being does not present. Goodness is that which is

\(^{11}\) S.T., I, 83, 3.
\(^{12}\) Henri Grenier, Thomistic Philosophy. Charlottetown: St. Dunstan's University, 1948, I, 505.
desirable, or that to which all things tend.

Habit

A habit is the proximate principle of good or bad operations, v.g., the virtue by which the will performs good acts, or as Aristotle says, 'that by reason of which we are well or ill disposed with regard to actions and passions. In another sense a habit is a quality by which a subject is well or badly disposed in itself either as regards its being or as regards its operation. It is the accident which results in a body from the adjuncts of clothing, arms, or ornaments.

Hypostasis

The personality of a being in its intelligent, incommunicable self-subsistence is referred to as hypostasis. The Summa calls it the individual of the rational nature, by reason of the excellence of that nature.(13)

Immortality

By immortality is meant that quality of a substance by the nature of which it is incapable of death--the separation of form from matter.(14)

Infinity

Infinity is in the strict sense the unlimited. That which is without limit is God. Do not confuse this with

(13) S.T., I, 29, 3.
the indefinite. The indefinite is that which is limited but whose limit is variable.

The negatively infinite is a form or act not limited by being received into matter or a subject. The privatively infinite is that infinity existing in matter with respect to its quantity, which was born to have a form but is not informed. This is an absence of a reality in act; it is the unlimited privation of actuality in uninformed matter.

Law

Law is an ordinance of reason promulgated by one having authority and for the common good.

"The Eternal Law is the Divine reason and will commanding that the natural order of things be preserved and forbidding that it be disturbed." - St. Augustine.

"Natural law is the participation of the eternal law in the rational creature, whereby it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end." (15)

Man

Man is a rational organic being, or a creature composed of body and spiritual, subsistent substantial form. He is a corporeal substance, operative within the dimensions of space and time, equipped with powers and habits that manifest his corporeal essence in acts of different sorts.

Monism

Monism is the name applied to those theories which seek

(15) S.T., I-II, 91, 2.
to reduce the ultimate explanation of all reality to a single formula or principle.

Modern monistic theories are of three types: spiritualistic monism or idealism, materialism, and the double aspect theory. The last named claims that spiritual thought and the functions of the brain are but two aspects of but one and the same thing.

Nature

"It is what informs a thing with its specific difference," according to Boethius. Nature designates the principle of action while essence comes from being. It is the principle and cause of the motion and the rest of the thing in which that principle exists fundamentally and essentially, and not accidentally.

The term 'nature' is used in its widest sense to designate the sum total of finite existent reality.

Necessity

Necessity is that which belongs to anything considered in itself. (16) That state in which a thing cannot be other than it is, is a state of necessity.

Order

A perfection of the relationship of beings among themselves describes order. There are three elements of order: the distinction of things, the cooperation of them, and

(16) S.T., I, 50, 5.
the end for which the order exists. (17) Order is the apt disposition of means toward an end.

Passion

It is that accident by which a subject is constituted as the actual recipient of the action of an agent. Every movement of the sensitive appetite is called a passion, and especially those which tend to some defect. (18)

Person

"A person is an individual substance of a rational nature." - Boethius. Person and personality are related as substance and accident.

Personality

In general, personality embraces the person with his actual development. Personality is generally described as integration of abilities, habits, and characteristics, mental or physical, that an individual actually possesses.

Potency

Since it is a first principle of being, it cannot be properly defined. It may be described as 'a principle which connotes a relation to act.' A thing in potency is a possible thing. The types of potency are numerous. A possible thing understood in a logical sense, is one which is not repugent, i.e., whose subject and predicate are not repugent (objective potency). A possible thing may

(18) S.T., I-II, 35, 1.
be understood in a real sense as when we say: a man can walk—he has the potency to walk (subjective Potency).

Subjective potency is pure or mixed. Pure potency is prime matter. Mixed potency is imperfect act, in as much as it is act which is in potency to further act.

Potency is passive or active. Passive potency is the real capacity of a being acted upon by another. Active potency is the real capacity for doing.

Potency is that power which enables anything to attain its perfection either in being, or in attaining to its end. (19) All things other than God are a composite of act and potency. Potency is to be understood in terms of act.

Principle

In general, a principle is defined as that from which something proceeds in any manner whatever. St. Thomas says it is that whence another proceeds. (20) A principle must be prior to that which proceeds from it. Priority can be logical or real. 'Logical' is that which, although it proceeds in neither time nor nature, has within itself the ground on account of which the mind conceives it as preceding the other, e.g., God's essence is prior to His attributes. 'Real' priority can be threefold: of time, of nature, or of origin. A thing has priority of time when it exists before that which proceeds from it. A

(19) S.T., I, 9, 2.
(20) S.T., I, 33, 2.
thing has priority of nature over another when this other presupposes the natural entity of the first for its own entity. Thus substance is prior to its accidents. A priority of origin is had when it precedes another in such a manner that there is a procession of the one from the other without any strict or real dependence. An example of the last is in the Blessed Trinity.

There is a distinction between cause and principle. Every cause is a principle but not every principle is a cause. A cause, which is a thing from which another proceeds, is always a principle, since a cause always exerts a positive influence in the production of a thing. However, there are some principles which do not produce anything and therefore are not causes.

Providence

Aquinas calls it the type of things ordered towards an end. (21) It is that directive care that is taken by someone over present things and events so that they may orderly achieve their ends. Since it is the ordering of things to an end, it must include right counsel, judgment as to the end and means necessary to its attainment, as well as the ability to establish precepts or laws according to which the means must operate.

Simplicity

Simplicity is the absence of parts or principles. It

(21) S.T., I, 22, 1.
is that perfection of a being in which there are no constitutive parts into which it can be resolved. This simplicity is metaphysical, when, in the order of reality, there is no composition; or it is physical, when, in the order of nature, there is no composition, e.g., substance without quantity; or logical, as found in the case of an idea that implies no further idea.

Soul

The soul is the act of a body having life potentially, or the act of a physical organic body having life potentially. Aristotle calls it the first act of a physically organic body.

Spirit

A simple substance subsisting in itself and not composed of integral or essential parts, intrinsically independent of matter. In man, since its spirit was made to inform matter, it is extrinsically dependent in certain operations upon the body.

Every spirit is either a complete substance or an incomplete substance. In finite spirits there is obviously the composition of subject and accident, essence and existence; in God there is no composition. A spirit must have a concrete being.

Spiritual

The spiritual pertains to the realm of the spirit. It

(22) S.T., I, 77, 1 and I, 76, 5.
is applied to all immaterial entities which are independent of matter in origin and activity. The difference between a finite concrete spirit and a material thing lies in the fact that the spirit has no parts outside of parts, while a material thing does have parts, their actual extension or inextension being a matter of secondary importance. There are spiritual accidents as well as substances. (The spiritual and the supernatural are utterly different concepts.)

**Subsistence**

The substance as it exists in itself and not in another, the Angelic Doctor calls 'subsistence'. (23) It is the perfection of existence whereby a being is total in itself and entirely incommunicable to others in a perfection of being. It completes the nature, terminates the essence into the fullness of itself as a single, complete, and separate reality, making it a thing in itself.

**Substance**

A substance is that which must subsist of itself, and not in another, (24) or a thing or quiddity to which it appertains to exist in itself, and not in another as in its subject of inherence. Its meaning is twofold: in one sense, it means the quiddity of a thing, signified by its definition—the essence. In another sense, substance means a subject, which subsists in the genus of substance. It is one of the fundamental classifications of beings—

(23) S.T., I, 29, 3.
(24) S.T., III, 77, 1.
a category. A substance is constituted into existence in such a manner as not to require the support of another being in its mode of existence. It differs from an accident in that an accident always requires another being in which it adheres in order to exist.

'Nature' is often used to designate any characteristics of an object, yet in the strict sense it means substance. Nature and substance have the same material object with different formal objects. 'Substance' is silent about activity; 'nature' asserts activity. A substance in respect to normal activities is a nature; a nature considered as independent of a subject in which to inhere is a substance.

Supernatural

The supernatural is that which is above the nature of a thing. Preternatural is that which is beyond the nature of a thing.

Time

Time is the number of movement in respect of before and after.

Real time is a measure of real motion. The idea of time, of course, is abstract and time is irreversible and uniform. Real time can be intrinsic, time as duration; or extrinsic, time as a measure. Extrinsic time is either primary or secondary. Primary time is the measure of the motion of the earth and is divided into sidereal, which is the interval between two consecutive
southing of a particular star; apparent, which is derived from the motion of the sun; or mean, which is the average of apparent time. Secondary time is the measure of any particular motion, as that of a clock. Absolute time is external to the material universe and contains within itself all durations; it includes imaginary (possible) time and real time.

The concept of time involves the idea of succession, which enables one to grasp the concept of past, present, and future and the idea of continuity and uniformity. The concept of time involves both subjective and objective aspects. Time is a being of reason with a foundation in reality. Time is based on the objective fact of local motion which supposes an extended field (extension). In time, one definite movement is employed as a standard for measuring other movements. However, one movement can be conceived of as a standard for measuring another only by an intelligence. If there were no minds, there would be no formal time.

Metaphysically, time is an accident of an accident. Movement is an accident of the material universe and time is an accident of movement taken as a measure.

Truth

The truth attributed to a thing, i.e., fundamental or ontological truth, is "the conformity of a thing to an intellect." (25) Truth is a transcendental attribute

(25) S.T., I, 16, 5,
convertible with being. Everything is what it is.

Logical truth is the conformity of a finite intelligence with the thing. Moral truth is the conformity of speech with thought.

Virtue

Virtue, in its widest sense, means the excellence or perfection of a thing. In its strict meaning, it is used to signify a habit superadded to a faculty of the soul, disposing it to elicit with readiness acts conformable to our rational nature. Since these habits conform to our rational nature, they are good moral habits.

The good moral habits are reducible to four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude. Prudence is the virtue of the practical intellect which prompts a man to select and use the best means to a good end. Justice is that moral virtue by which one wills to give every man his just due. Temperance is that moral virtue which restrains the undue impulse of concupiscence for sensible pleasure. Fortitude is the virtue which for worthy ends braces the soul to meet danger courageously.

A virtue is a morally good operative habit. Its opposite is a vice, a morally evil operative habit.

Theoretically, there are natural and supernatural virtues.

A virtue is a good operative habit; a good quality of the mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us, without us. (26)

(26) S.T., I-II, 55, 4.
The inclination towards good but with a knowledge whereby they perceive the aspect of goodness is known as the will. This belongs to the intellect. (27) It is the power to strive for an intellectually perceived good and to shun an intellectually perceived evil.

(27) S.T., Im 59, 1.
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