

Reflexivity and Self-Awareness in Aquinas

The texts of the 13th century bear little trace of anything like the modern notion of the “Self,” the “Ego,” or the “Subject.” Consequently, it is sometimes assumed that medieval theories of the human person are exclusively metaphysical and incapable of capturing the richness of human personhood in the psychological sense.¹ Part of the problem is that terms like “subject” and “person” have quite a different significance in the medieval philosophical vocabulary—so medieval discussions of personhood rarely reveal how an author handles the psychological phenomena associated with selfhood or subjectivity. I suggest that on this point, some insight can be gained by looking in a rather unlikely place: namely, medieval discussions of the reflexivity of the immaterial soul, a theme of Neoplatonic origin. In this paper, I will focus on Aquinas’s theory of reflexivity, which grounds his account of phenomena such as implicit self-awareness, the duality of experience, the unity of consciousness, and even free choice. Aquinas’s theory of the reflexivity of the human soul thus unites the metaphysical significance of *psyche* as soul or mind, and its psychological significance as self or ego.

In order to sketch how, for Aquinas, the soul’s reflexivity affects human selfhood, I will begin in the first section by explaining Aquinas’s discussion of reflexivity as a property of what is immaterial. In the second and third sections, I will outline how reflexivity shapes the character

¹ Crosby, for instance, argues that one ought to study human beings “not only in terms of substance, potentiality, rationality, and the like, but also in terms of subjectivity, that is, in terms such as self-presence, inwardness, self-donation. Only by probing the subjectivity of human beings can we understand them in all their personhood”; see John F. Crosby, *The Selfhood of the Human Person* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 84; Crosby here relies on Karol Wojtyła, “Subjectivity and the Irreducible in Man,” in *Analecta Husserliana*, vol. 7 (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1978), 107–114. The notion of subjectivity as definitive of personhood is in some authors emphasized to such an extent that Romano Guardini, *The World and the Person* (Chicago: Regnery, 1965): 215–16, even asks, “Can we, while doing justice to the concept of ‘person,’ speak meaningfully of ‘two persons’? . . . Here reason balks” (cited here according to the altered translation in Crosby, 51).

of human cognition, allowing the soul to experience the world from a single conscious viewpoint. Lastly, turning from the realm of cognition, I will note briefly how the soul's reflexivity affects free human agency. Throughout, I will use the term "self-awareness" to refer to one's cognition of one's own individual self (as opposed to cognition of one's own essence).

I. Aquinas's Theory of the Soul's Reflexivity

Aquinas's view of the soul as inherently reflexive has its roots in the Neoplatonic doctrine of the soul's bending or turning back upon itself, often referred to in Greek by the term ἐπιστροφή πρὸς ἑαυτόν,² and rendered in Latin by terms such as *reflexio* or *conversio* (a turning back upon oneself) and *reditio* (a return). In particular, the Thomistic discussion of the soul's reflexivity is indebted to propositions 7 and 15 of the anonymous Arabic text, the *Liber de causis*.³ Here, I will focus on the especially clear discussion of reflexivity in Aquinas's commentary on the *Liber de causis*, though I should note that the same doctrine appears elsewhere in Aquinas's writings.

Reflexivity, for Aquinas, is grounded primarily in the soul's immateriality and consequent indivisibility. In commenting on the *Liber de causis*, prop. 7, on the indivisibility of intellectual substances, Aquinas explains that material entities cannot fully turn back upon themselves, because their extended parts get in the way. Each part of a body can turn back upon another part (as when I touch my shoulder), but no body can entirely turn back upon itself, since

² See the numerous texts cited in Richard Sorabji, *The Philosophy of the Commentators 200–600 AD: A Sourcebook*, vol. 1, *Psychology (With Ethics and Religion)* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005), 161–81. Gerson provides a very interesting analysis of what he calls "self-reflexivity" as just one of its meanings; see his "*Epistrophe pros heauton*."

³ Translated into Latin in the late 12th century and originally attributed to Aristotle, the *Liber de causis* exercised considerable authority on scholars of the day and was included in 1255 among the required texts for students at the University of Paris. See *Von Bagdad nach Toledo*, ed. Fidora and Niederberger, 17; Saffrey, "Introduction," in *Super librum de causis*, xix. Aquinas himself was very much influenced by the *Liber de causis*, referring to it by name approximately 300 times throughout his works, although it is not until 1272–73, near the end of his life, that he composed a detailed commentary on it. But Aquinas would have also been familiar with reflexivity from Pseudo-Dionysius's discussion of circular motion in *De divinis nominibus* IV.7, and once it was translated in 1268, the *Elementatio theologiae* of Proclus.

matter is extended and therefore has parts outside of parts. This means that because of the extension of matter, the whole of *A* can never turn back upon the whole of *A*.

The soul, in contrast, is fully reflexive, capable of completely turning back upon itself, because it is immaterial. Aquinas explains that one argument for the incorporeality of an intellectual substance is that it “*returns upon its essence*, that is, that it is turned back upon itself by understanding itself, which is proper to it because it is not a body or a magnitude having one part distant from another.”⁴ Only an indivisible and incorporeal being can be made wholly present to itself since it has no parts that get in the way of each other. An immaterial being is thus wholly reflexive; it is, so to speak, like a self-seeing eye, completely transparent to itself and wholly available to itself, entirely present to itself, fully able to return upon itself and appropriate itself cognitively. This transparency should not be taken in the sense that the soul always “sees through” itself without ever actually seeing itself. The soul is not transparent to itself in the way that air is transparent, i.e., as an invisible medium for light. Rather, for Aquinas the soul’s transparency means that the entire soul, even the perceiving power or the “mind’s eye,” is within the scope of its own intellectual “vision”—it is transparent to itself, then, in the sense that its self-identity poses no obstacle to its entirely cognizing itself, when the conditions are right.

To put it another way, material powers are opaque to themselves. There is always some part of the material power itself that is necessarily excluded from that power’s potential objects: thus my eyeball can receive every visible object except itself. But *there is in principle no aspect of the human soul that is outside the range of its own intellect*, not even the perceiving intellect itself. As Aquinas explains in *SCG* II.49, “the action of no body reflects back upon the agent: for it is shown in physics that no body is moved by itself except in part, namely, insofar as one of its

⁴ *Sup. Lib. de caus.*, prop. 7. Other texts in which immateriality is linked to self-knowledge include *In Sent.* II.19.1.1; and *SCG* 2.49, which echoes Augustine’s notion of the soul knowing itself as a whole. All translations of Aquinas are my own.

parts is the mover and the other is moved. But the intellect is reflected upon itself by acting: for it understands itself, not only part-by-part, but as a whole (*secundum totum*). So it is not a body.”⁵

This point is of paramount importance for Aquinas’s understanding of human subjecthood. The intellectual soul is not limited merely to perceiving its acts of thinking, or perceiving some part of itself that is distinct from the perceiving part. Rather, the perceiving part can perceive itself, the perceiving part. This is true reflexivity, of which only immaterial beings are capable.⁶ And this, I would argue, is for Aquinas what allows an intellectual being to understand itself as “I” and not “it.” The intellect is not limited to perceiving things apart from itself, but it is able to reflect precisely upon itself, the perceiving agent, the very source from which that act of perceiving proceeds.

Reflexivity, then, is simply the soul’s complete transparency to itself. This self-transparency is the way that the soul fundamentally *is* and shapes the way that the soul *acts*. It is important to be very precise about what this means, for Aquinas. On the one hand, self-transparency does not mean (at least for Aquinas), that the human soul completely and thoroughly comprehends itself with a quasi-Divine knowledge. Nor does it mean that the human soul is always actually reflecting upon itself. In fact, for Aquinas, the soul engages in the act of reflexion only infrequently, when it turns its attention back towards itself and considers itself

⁵ Interestingly, whereas this argument treats the intellect’s cognition of *itself*, the next argument in *SCG* II.49 treats the ability to understand one’s own *act* as something only an immaterial power can do.

⁶ Aquinas’s position on whether the senses are partially reflexive or just not at all reflexive, is difficult to determine. In some texts, he appears to hold that the sense powers cannot reflect upon themselves at all. Sometimes he states that the senses cannot cognize their own acts (*In Sent.* I.17.5, ad 3; *In Sent.* III.23.1.2, ad 3; *ST* Ia, 87.3, ad 3; suggested in *SCG* II.49); sometimes he states that the corporeal organ blocks every sense from cognizing *itself* (*In Sent.* II.19.1.1 and *De spir. creat.* 9, ad 6; *ST* Ia, 14.2, ad 1; see also *De unit. int.* 5 and *SCG* II.49). In a handful of texts, however, Aquinas accords to the senses an “incomplete return” whereby they perceive their acts (interestingly, he describes this as perceiving “that they sense”; see *DV* 1.9 and 10.9; *Quodl.* VIII.9.1) His apparent inconsistency on this point is puzzling. For discussion, see Putallaz, *Le sens de la réflexion*. In any case, it does not affect our argument here, since the most he ever grants to the senses is the ability to reflect upon their acts, and true reflexivity requires that the intellect be capable of reflecting upon, not only its acts, but *itself*—an ability Aquinas consistently denies to any power using a material organ.

explicitly.⁷ Rather, for Aquinas, the fundamental condition of the soul is one of *being able* to turn back upon itself in its entirety, so that I *can* perceive myself, the perceiving agent, and eventually come to understand the very essence of my soul. But on the other hand, one should not shortchange reflexivity by assuming that it is simply the capacity for thinking about oneself. For Aquinas, the only reason that it is possible for me to think about myself is that my soul is transparent to itself, as described above—and the soul’s self-transparency affects the character of all human acts. Indeed, from this basic, essential self-transparency flows a unique way of *acting* in a self-aware or self-possessed way. Thus for Aquinas, the soul’s inherent reflexivity, grounded in immateriality, guarantees that the soul’s immaterial operations of intellect and will are curiously transparent to itself. For this reason, the soul acts in a “self-possessed” sort of way, insofar as its day-by-day thinking and judging and willing always include a dimension of self-awareness. Let us turn then to human cognition, to examine the way in which the soul’s basic self-transparency is at the very heart of what it means for a human being to understand.

II. Reflexivity and the Duality of Experience

For Aquinas, Aristotle’s theory of intellectual cognition by identity provides a more precise way of explaining how the soul’s self-transparency posited by the Neoplatonic doctrine of reflexion affects the character of its cognition. Following Aristotelian commentators such as Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, and Averroes,⁸ Aquinas holds that because the intellect becomes actually intelligible to itself in the moment in which it cognizes anything at all, an

⁷ Occasionally Aquinas will refer to self-awareness as a “reflexion upon oneself” or a “reflexion upon one’s acts”; I take him to be referring to explicit self-awareness in such cases. See *In Sent.* III, 23.1.2, ad 3; *DV* 1.5, ad 5, *DV* 2.6; *SCG* 2.75; *SCG* 4.11; *ST* Ia, 85.2; *QDDA* 2, ad 5; and *DP* 7.9.

⁸ Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De intellectu* 109.7 [trans. Schroeder and Todd, 50—and note that Albert cites the former text in his own *De hom.* 2.3.3 to explain how the intellect necessarily cognizes itself in every one of its acts]; id., *De anima* 3.18, 86.23–28 [trans. Fontina, 113]; Averroes, see *Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis De anima* III.8 [ed. Crawford, 420:19–21]. See also Themistius, *Paraphrase of ‘De anima’* 3.4–8 95.9 [trans. Schroeder and Todd, 82]; and Philoponus, *In de intellectu*, in *Commentaire sur le de anima d’Aristote, traduction de Guillaume de Moerbeke*, ed. G. Verbeke, *Corpus Latinum Commentariorum in Aristotelem Graecorum* 3 (Paris: Editions Béatrice-Nauwelaerts, 1966), 20–21.

implicit self-awareness (corresponding perhaps to what is sometimes called pre-reflexive consciousness) is included in every cognitive act. The soul's self-transparency means that it cannot help but see "through" itself every time it sees anything at all.

To see how this works, let's take as an example the intellect's act of understanding spiders. The act of understanding spider-nature, according to Aquinas's identity theory of cognition, happens when the intellect receives the form of spider as matter receives form. Now, the human intellect can receive the form of spider, because the human intellect is like prime matter: it is in potency to all form, having no form of its own. Consequently, when the intellect receives spider-form, it adopts this *as its own form*. What cognition means, for Aquinas, is that in the act of cognizing spiders, spider-form *is* intellect-form. One and the same form is the formality / actuality / species of the *intellect* just as much as it is the formality / actuality / species of the *spider*.

Thus in the instant in which the intellect receives a form, the intellect itself now fulfils all the conditions for being-cognized: it is present to itself, immaterial, and actual. The received form of 'spider', inhering in the intellect, makes the *intellect* actually intelligible to itself just as much as it makes *spiders* actually intelligible to the intellect. "The soul is not cognized by another species abstracted from itself, but by a species of its object, which also becomes its own form insofar as it is actually understanding."⁹ One could say that the reception of the form of 'spider' lights the intellect up to itself.

These considerations form the basis for an ironclad principle of Aquinas's theory of self-cognition: I know myself *only* in my acts, and in *all* my acts. This principle has two important implications for the way in which humans, as intellectual beings, experience the world. First, I can only perceive myself in the act of cognizing something else; i.e., I perceive myself, not as a

⁹ *DV* 10.8, ad s.c. 5; see also *ST* Ia, 87.1, ad 3; *QDDA* 3, ad 4; and *In De an.* III.3.

bare self, but always as the subject of some outer-directed act: cognizing something other, sensing something other, loving something other.¹⁰

The second implication of this view is that *every* intellectual act of cognition includes some self-awareness. The form of ‘spider’ that has informed my intellect, in “lighting up” the spider to me, necessarily “lights” me up to myself.¹¹ Thus whenever I am thinking about anything at all, I am implicitly aware of myself as the one who is thinking about that thing, as Aquinas suggests: “[I]n perceiving its acts, [the mind] understands itself *whenever it understands something*.”¹² In other words, in explicitly thinking about the spider, I cannot help but perceive it as manifest *to me*. I and the spider are co-illuminated indissociably in a single act of cognition; the spider explicitly, and myself implicitly.

Now as I read Aquinas, this doctrine that the soul knows itself in all its acts and only in its acts, is just Aquinas’s way of accounting for the duality inherent in all intellectual experience. No matter how intensely my attention is drawn to the nature of spiders, thinking about them in fear and loathing, I never lose sight of myself as the one thinking about spiders. Later you can ask me, “so, what were you thinking about just now?” And I’ll be able to answer the question, because in remembering spiders, I remember *myself thinking about spiders*. Conversely, if I stop what I’m doing and turn my attention inward to myself, I find myself always as the subject of some act; I catch myself in the act of thinking about spiders, or trying not to.

Thus every intellectual act contains an ineradicable duality, in which subject and object are indissociably experienced in relation to each other. Human thought takes place from the

¹⁰ See DV 10.8: “With respect to actual cognition, by which someone actually considers that he has a soul, I say this: that the soul is known by its acts. . . [For] no one perceives that he understands except from the fact that he understands *something*”; *In Sent.* I.3.4.5; *ST Ia*, 111.1, ad 3; *DV* 8.6; *DV* 18.1, ad 10; and *In Ethic.* III.3

¹¹ *ST Ia*, 87.1, ad 3: “The human intellect, which is rendered into act by the species of the understood thing, is understood through that same species, as through its form.” See also *DV* 8.6; *DV* 10.8, ad 10 s.c.; *DV* 18.1, ad 10; *In Ethic.* III.3; *ST Ia*, 14.2, ad 3; *ST Ia*, 93.7, ad 4; *ST Ia*, 111.1, ad 3; *ST IIa-IIae*, 25.2; *In Sent.* I.17.1.4.

¹² *ST Ia*, 93.7, ad 4.

unique vantage point of a subject, an “I” who perceives things *precisely as being manifested to me*, and who perceives myself *precisely as the subject cognizing what is other* than myself. For Aquinas, this phenomenon is simply the result of the soul’s transparency to itself in its acts. Given Aquinas’s very Aristotelian account of intellection as the assimilation of knower to known, it would be contrary to the immaterial nature of the intellect for an act of knowledge to be opaque to the knower. And given the Neoplatonic doctrine of the complete reflexivity of immaterial being, the illuminated human intellect doesn’t just perceive a part of itself. Rather, it is entirely transparent to itself, so that when it is lit up to itself, it grasps itself as a whole, as the “I” or subject.

Thus for Aquinas, to be an intellectual or reflexive being necessarily implies the capacity for subjecthood, because actual intellection is always ineliminably twofold, illuminating the knowing intellect and its known object in a single act. As Aquinas puts it, “Whoever understands or is illuminated cognizes that he understands or is illuminated, because he cognizes that the thing is manifest to him.”¹³ No matter whether a given act directs one’s attention towards the intellect itself or towards the other, this dimension of duality remains.¹⁴

III. Reflexivity and the Unity of Consciousness

Fusing both Neoplatonic and Aristotelian themes, then, Aquinas conceives of the soul as a reflexive being, both in the sense that the intellect is essentially *able* to turn back to perceive its perceiving self as “I,” and in the sense that in every act the soul is lit up to itself and perceives itself implicitly. These same themes can, I think, with the assistance of various clues from Aquinas’s texts, be used to outline a Thomistic account of an important phenomenon that is

¹³ *ST Ia*, 111.1, ad 3.

¹⁴ For this reason, I disagree with Dhavamony’s argument that when the intellect explicitly knows itself as object, it is attaining itself “as something distinct and opposed to itself” (*Subjectivity and Knowledge*, 67). This would be to know oneself in the third person; but this contradicts experience, as well as the basic principles of Aquinas’s theory of cognition by identity, as outlined here.

associated with being a person in the sense of a “self”: the unity of consciousness across time. Since there just isn’t time to go into this topic in depth here, I will simply sketch out a possible path for inquiry, in order to show that Aquinas’s view of the human soul may be able to accommodate quite a sophisticated psychology of selfhood.

In discussing this point, it is important to emphasize again that Aquinas has no notion of “the self” as of some sort of transcendent entity. For Aquinas, there is simply the human being, an intellectual agent whose cognitive acts have certain special characteristics on account of certain special metaphysical features of the agent. Thus all I want to argue here is that in the principles of Aquinas’s theory of cognition, flowing from the soul’s reflexivity, are the rudiments of an account for the following phenomenon: namely, that the human subject experiences reality from one consistent “viewpoint.” I do not have a disconnected sequence of perceptions; rather, there is a basic continuity in my experiences, insofar as they are both experienced as *mine* and remembered as *mine*; the same “I” appears as the subject of every conscious act. I suggest that one can find a Thomistic account of this phenomenon, in the role that Aquinas ascribes to implicit self-awareness in intellectual memory.

In order to account for the unity of consciousness across time, Aquinas’s theory of cognition needs to fulfil two conditions: 1) in every act there must be some sort of awareness of the subjective perspective from which each act takes place; and 2) this subjective perspective must be experienced precisely *as the same*, throughout multiple present and past cognitions. The first condition is satisfied by the implicit self-awareness that results from the soul’s self-transparency. As I argued above, for Aquinas, to think about *A* is just to be explicitly aware of *A-as-thought-by-me*, and to be implicitly aware of myself-as-thinking-*A*. Thus every conscious act unavoidably carries a reference to “me,” the acting subject.

But in order for implicit self-awareness to translate into a unity of consciousness across time, the second condition must also be fulfilled: namely, it is necessary for me not only to perceive myself in my act of thinking about philosophy right now, but to remember previously cognized items *as having been previously cognized by the same me*. This condition is fulfilled in the reflexive character of what Aquinas calls intellectual memory.¹⁵

Aquinas argues that we can remember, not just images of sensible particulars, but also intelligible forms like the nature of triangles or justice. Images of sensed things are stored by the internal sense of memory. Intelligible forms are stored by the intellect itself when it receives them as its own form; the intellect itself is therefore the power of intellectual memory. But there is a problem. As Aquinas points out, memory involves some sense of time. But the objects of intellect are indifferent to time: in order to be received into the intellect, a form must be stripped of all its elements of material particularity, *including its place in time*. Thus the intellect cannot grasp things as past—so intellectual memory should be impossible.¹⁶

In order to solve this problem, Aquinas proposes that not only material objects, but also cognitive acts, exist in time. Although dog-nature, as the object of understanding, is indifferent to time, the *act of understanding dog-nature* is itself something existing in time, with a particular place in a sequence of cognitive acts, *after* certain acts, and *before* the present act. Thus to

¹⁵ The main texts on sense-memory and intellectual memory in Thomas are *In Sent.* I.3.4.1, *DV* 10.2–3, *ST* Ia, 79.6–7, and *In De mem.*, esp. c. 2. The secondary literature on this theme is sparse, but for discussion, see George P. Klubertanz, *The Discursive Power: Sources and Doctrine of the Vis Cogitativa according to St. Thomas Aquinas* (Carthagen, Oh.: The Messenger Press, 1952), 160–62; J. Castonguay, *Psychologie de la mémoire: sources et doctrine de la memoria chez saint Thomas d’Aquin*, 1st ed. (Montreal: Lévrier, 1963); Marcos F. Manzanedo, *La imaginación y la memoria según santo Tomás* (Rome: Herder, 1978), 275–382; Héctor Hernando Salinas, “El problema de la memoria intelectual en Tomás de Aquino,” *Universitas Philosophica* 42 (2004): 87–115; Patricia Schell, “La doctrina tomista de la memoria espiritual: un punto de equilibrio ante las anomalías contemporánea,” *Sapientia* 59 (2004): 49–75; and Kevin White, notes to *Commentaries on Aristotle’s “On Sense and What is Sensed” and “On Memory and Recollection,”* trans. Kevin White and Edward M. Macierowski (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005). For discussion of the relation between memory and personal identity, see Martín Federico Echevarría, “Memoria e identidad según Santo Tomás de Aquino,” *Sapientia* 62 (2002): 91–112.

¹⁶ *ST* Ia, 79.6, ad 2.

remember dog-nature is to remember *myself having thought about the nature of dogs at a particular time in the past*:

The understanding of our soul is a particular act, existing in this or that time, insofar as a man is said to know now or yesterday or tomorrow. . . . Therefore in this way the account (*ratio*) of memory is preserved with respect to what there is of past things in the intellect, insofar as it understands itself to have understood previously, but not insofar as it understands the previous thing *qua* here and now.¹⁷

For Aquinas, then, intellectual memory is inherently reflexive. The implicit self-awareness that is included in every act of cognition, is such an integral part of the act of cognition that it is stored with the species. To put it another way, the species of dog-nature is stored *as cognized by me at this particular time*. It is “stamped,” and even “time-stamped,” so to speak, by the act in which it was cognized. When the species is recalled and used in a later act of cognition, I recall the object as having previously been cognized by me. “For always when the soul remembers, it judges itself to have heard or sensed or understood something before.”¹⁸ The remembering of the object is inseparable from the remembering of myself in the act of thinking about that object. Consequently, not only my present experience, but also my past experiences, are transparent to the same me. In this way, implicit self-awareness, a necessary part of every cognition and every memory, anchors all my intentional acts in a single persisting viewpoint.¹⁹

Thus for Aquinas, the reflexivity of the soul is the specially self-possessed character of human cognition, in every act and across time. Because all my acts are transparent to me, the same subject-perspective is an integral part of every conscious act, and remains an integral part of my memories. My consciousness is unified by a single subject-perspective which remains the same across time, the same “I” that is perceived implicitly in my present acts and past memories.

¹⁷ *ST* Ia, 79.6, ad 2. Aquinas repeats the same theme frequently throughout *In De mem.*; see for instance c. 1 [Leon. 45/1.161–62]; c. 6 [123:11–124:60]; c. 7 [129:150–84].

¹⁸ *In De mem.* 1 [Leon. 45/2.160:161–62].

¹⁹ Putallaz notes that self-awareness is what gathers together and unifies awareness of one’s object, which is otherwise scattered and dispersed into many acts (though he does not offer an explanation of how this is possible); see *Le sens de la réflexion*, 93. See also Dhavamony, *Subjectivity and Knowledge*, 77.

In conclusion: the essential self-transparency of the immaterial soul constitutes the metaphysical ground for Aquinas's account of what contemporary philosophers would call selfhood. In putting the many-faceted Neoplatonic theme of reflexion into dialogue with the Aristotelian identity theory of cognition, Aquinas is able to provide an account of how the human person experiences the world from a first-person perspective as an aware and self-aware subject. Reflexivity is a rich phenomenon that Aquinas unpacks on many levels. In one way, reflexivity is the soul's ability to turn back upon itself fully in acts of intellection and volition, so that it can cognize itself, the cognizing agent, as "I." In another way, reflexivity as self-transparency, for Aquinas, links up with Aristotle's identity theory of cognition. Although the human intellectual soul remains unintelligible or un-lit to itself in the absence of a form received from the senses, this self-transparency means that in the instant in which it is lit up in receiving a form, the soul "sees through itself," so to speak. In this way, the human being acts in a "self-possessed" way, in which awareness and self-awareness are simply two sides of the same cognitive experience. Finally, free choice is rooted in the reflexive properties of the practical judgment and the will. Thus for Aquinas, reflexivity, as the root of selfhood, uniquely marks the way that a human being experiences and interacts with the world.