

# Thomistic Psychology in the Works of Fr. Angel de Blas, OP

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**Abstract:** The celebration of the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Christianity in the Philippines is also an opportunity for the University of Santo Tomas (Manila) to look into her own history, and on how that history intersects with the larger history of Christianity in the Philippines. Being one of the oldest Christian institutions in the Philippines, the University has been home to several thinkers who have, in their own way, contributed to the growth of Christianity in the country.

This paper takes a historical look at the contribution of one Thomasian, Fr. Angel de Blas, OP, who wrote and taught in the University of Santo Tomas from the early to the middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. He thrived at a time when new developments were emerging in the academic landscape of the Philippines, particularly in the area of philosophy and psychology. At that time, psychology was slowly emerging as a distinct discipline in the human sciences, and the philosophical temperament in the country was also slowly embracing traditions other than scholasticism and Thomism.

The paper will attempt to articulate Fr. Angel de Blas, OP's contribution during this time of the transition. It also hopes to show that this Dominican has demonstrated a way of dialoguing Catholic philosophy and life with the developments of the sciences.

**Keywords:** Twentieth Century Thomism in the Philippines, University of Santo Tomas, Thomistic Psychology, History of Psychology in the Philippines

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## Introduction

The school of thought that guides the ideals of the University of Santo Tomas, founded and run by Dominican Friars, is that of St. Thomas Aquinas. However, it is interesting to note that part of the University's continued development throughout its history, i.e., from the beginning until the middle of the twentieth century is the emergence of schools of thought other than Thomism and the Thomist school's dialogue both with these non-Thomist schools and with natural sciences.<sup>1</sup> In the recent publication of Prof. Emeritus Alfredo P. Co, *Doing Philosophy in the Philippines: The Thomasian Collection*, vol. 1,<sup>2</sup> he provided a description of the landscape of Philosophy in the University of Santo Tomas during the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His account is considered the most immediate and reliable rendition of the development of Philosophy in the country during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as he is a scholar who began and lived his journey in Philosophy during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond. In Professor Co's recollection, one of the major and influential figures in Philosophy in the mid-20th Century Philippines is the Spanish Friar, Fr. Angel de Blas, OP, who was a professor of Philosophy while concurrently serving the University in various capacities as an administrator, including his post as the University's *Rector Magnificus* in 1948-1952. According to Professor Co, Fr. Angel de Blas, OP "particularly influenced the first Filipino scholars of the University."<sup>3</sup> Realizing Father de Blas' immense contribution and influence in the development of Philosophy not only in the University of Santo Tomas but to the entire country as well, this paper articulates, even if only partially, his contribution in the preservation and growth of Philosophy, specifically in Thomistic Psychology.<sup>4</sup>

Regarding the development of Philosophy in the University of Santo Tomas, Professor Co stated that the beginning of Filipino philosophical scholarship

<sup>1</sup> Fr. Fidel Villarroel, OP argued that this began even much earlier. An example is seen in the method of Fr. Zeferino Gonzalez, OP who published his *Estudios sobre la Filosofía Santo Tomás* in 1864 [see Fidel Villarroel, *A History of the University of Santo Tomas: Four Centuries of High Education in the Philippines*, vol II (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2012), 59]. Fr. Villarroel claimed that "by mid-19th century, Zeferino Gonzalez – and other Thomists – changed the manner of presenting St. Thomas Aquinas' doctrine to the intellectual world" (Villarroel, *A History of the University of Santo Tomas*, 62). He further added that in doing this, the Thomists in UST made their apology of Aquinas not by ignoring the dominant philosophical trends of Europe at this time but by studying them thoroughly and by comparing them with the teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas.

<sup>2</sup> Alfredo P. Co, *Doing Philosophy in the Philippines: The Thomasian Collection*, vol. 1 (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Co, *Doing Philosophy in the Philippines*, vol. 1, xxiv.

<sup>4</sup> Another group of works published by Fr. de Blas is in the area of Logic including the following titles which most probably were used in his classes: "The Logical Structure of Judgement, 1941," "Nature of Logic, 1950," and "Essentials of Logic, 1951," among others. These three titles were published in the journal of the University, *Unitas*.

happened in the mid-1950s to the mid-1980s.<sup>5</sup> This was made possible through the studies of the pioneering Filipinos who completed their Philosophy graduate degrees abroad and returned from their studies to create “a new philosophical landscape in the Philippines.”<sup>6</sup> While Thomistic philosophy remained central in the University of Santo Tomas, other schools of thought were also introduced. An example of this is the emergence of Existentialism, Phenomenology, Eastern Philosophy especially Chinese and Indian Philosophy, Analytic Philosophy, and Marxist Political Philosophy.<sup>7</sup> This is considered a development, but it did not disregard the influence and relevance of the thoughts of Thomas Aquinas in the University of Santo Tomas. In fact, this is something that will help promote the works of Thomists in the University.<sup>8</sup>

What we will see then in the academic landscape of the University during this part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is that those who studied and published in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas started to venture the expansion of the reach of the philosophy of the Angelic Doctor, and this was done by bringing his thoughts and teachings to the discussions of the other disciplines in the University. This is evidenced for example in the projects of two prominent Dominicans who brought Aquinas to two important fields in the natural sciences: Fr. Ciriaco Pedrosa, OP who completed his PhD in Mathematics in 1934,<sup>9</sup> and Fr. Angel de Blas, OP<sup>10</sup> who worked in psychology, particularly experimental psychology.

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<sup>5</sup> Co, *Doing Philosophy in the Philippines*, vol. 1, xxv.

<sup>6</sup> Co, *Doing Philosophy in the Philippines*, vol. 1, xxv.

<sup>7</sup> cf. Co, *Doing Philosophy in the Philippines*, vol. 1, xxviii to xxxi.

<sup>8</sup> See footnote number 1 above. Fr. Villarroel would even claim further that Zeferino Gonzales is lamenting against the fact that many of his contemporaries were “showing great ignorance of contemporary rationalist philosophy,” and so he set out as his task that of bringing out the “authentic spirit and main principles of the philosophy of the Angelic doctor... by *comparing* his method of solving these problems with that of the rationalistic and anti-Christian philosophers” (Zeferino Gonzalez, *Estudios sobre la Filosofía Santo Tomás*, vol. I, xiv as cited by Villarroel, *A History of the University of Santo Tomas*, vol. II, 64). It is important to study doctrines other than that of Aquinas, including even those that are opposed to his, in order to better examine the ways that lead to the Truth. This is also reiterated later by the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* when it said that “let carefully selected teachers endeavor to implant the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas in the minds of students, and set forth clearly his solidity and excellence over others. Let the universities already founded or to be founded by you illustrate and defend this doctrine, and use it for the refutation of prevailing errors” (*Aeterni Patris*, 31). I will also attempt to show below that Fr. de Blas’ writings are guided by this methodology.

<sup>9</sup> In 1934, he wrote a dissertation with the title, “The Differential equation and the physical phenomenon.” This dissertation can be accessed in the library of the University of Santo Tomas.

<sup>10</sup> As of writing this paper, I am not able to locate an extant copy of his dissertation but Fr. Fidel Villarroel, OP reported that Fr. Angel de Blas, OP completed his Doctor of Philosophy and Letters in 1934 (see Villarroel, *A History of the University of Santo Tomas*, vol. II, 64 & 487); also Marissa Nicasio, “Angel de Blas, O.P. and the Development of Experimental Psychology in the Philippines,” *Philippiniana Sacra*, vol. LI, no. 154 (2016): 618. Reading the *Naturaleza de la Afectividad* (published in several parts by the *Unitas*), it seems that this was the dissertation that he prepared for his Doctorate degree.

These two Thomists have influenced two important developments in the progress of Philosophy in the University of Santo Tomas. Father Pedrosa paved the way for the strengthening of *Philosophy of Science*, particularly the dialogue of Philosophy with Chemistry and Physics. Father Pedrosa also motivated younger Dominicans to work in this area, most notable among them is Fr. Norberto Castillo, OP,<sup>11</sup> a chemist who did his PhD in Philosophy and who openly claimed Fr. Ciriaco Pedrosa, OP as his mentor. Father Castillo himself would later become an authority in the *Philosophy of Science* as he combined Thomistic-Aristotelianism with his expertise in Chemistry. Then, Fr. Angel de Blas, OP sponsored the study and teaching of Experimental Psychology both in the College of Liberal Arts and in the Ecclesiastical Faculty of Philosophy, and he influenced such scholars as Jose Espinosa and was followed by the likes of Antonio Piñon and Manuel Piñon, OP.

I will attempt to delineate the extent of this influence as well as the content of his published works in this area.

### **Fr. Angel de Blas, OP and the Beginnings of the Department of Psychology in the University of Santo Tomas**

Most standard accounts of the history of Psychology in the Philippines<sup>12</sup> will mention the name of Fr. Angel de Blas, OP as among its pioneers, recognizing especially that Psychology was brought to the country by the Spanish Friars through the area of Philosophical or Rational Psychology<sup>13</sup> within the tradition of Thomism. When Experimental Psychology was yet slowly emerging as a discipline that is distinct from Philosophy,<sup>14</sup> even in the intellectual landscape of Europe,<sup>15</sup> and where the pioneers of this field in the Philippines were also making their important contributions a few decades after, Father de Blas was actively part of the development.

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<sup>11</sup> He wrote a dissertation in 1975 with the title, “The Unity of the Atom.”

<sup>12</sup> Among these are the ones from Patricia Licuanan, “Psychology in the Philippines: History and Current Trends,” *Philippine Studies*, vol. 33 (1985): 68; Richard Velayo, “Philippine Psychology: A Glimpse at Its History and Recent Developments,” *International Psychology Reporter*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2003): 16.

<sup>13</sup> The website of the UST Department of Psychology even traces the beginnings of psychology in the University of Santo Tomas as far back as 1645 where Psychology was part of the curriculum of philosophy (see <https://www.ust.edu.ph/science/departament-of-psychology>, accessed on May 30, 2021).

<sup>14</sup> see Licuanan, “Psychology in the Philippines,” 67.

<sup>15</sup> see Wolfgang Schönplüg, “History of Psychology in Germany,” *Československá psychologie*, ročník LIX, číslo 2 (2015). The author here even noted that the ‘first psychological institute’ was opened by Wilhelm Wundt at the University of Leipzig, Germany in 1883. El-hay said that, “the emergence of psychology as a distinct scientific discipline is generally dated to 1879, when the German physiologist Wilhelm Wundt opened the first psychological laboratory at the University of Leipzig in Germany” [Mohamed Ahmed Abd El-Hay, *Understanding Psychology for Medicine and Nursing Insights and Applications* (New York and London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 5].

While the *University of the Philippines* is credited as the first University to open a Psychology department attached to the school of Education, the University of Santo Tomas was the first to open a program in Psychology (BS major in Psychology) in 1948, and then later its graduate programs.<sup>16</sup> Undoubtedly, these developments at the University of Santo Tomas were realized through the efforts and support of Fr. Angel de Blas, OP who served as the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts (now the College of Science) from 1940-1949, and was also the first chairperson of the Department of Psychology when it was established within the College of Liberal Arts. Fr. Angel de Blas, OP was also responsible for the establishment of the country's first Experimental Psychology laboratory in 1940,<sup>17</sup> just about half a century from the opening of Wilhelm Wundt's first psychology laboratory of the world. Wundt's contribution is globally recognized, and he is now regarded as the Father of Modern Psychology.<sup>18</sup>

Though occupied with his several responsibilities as an administrator in the University, Fr. de Blas devoted his time to writing and teaching, and one of the lasting contributions that he bequeathed the University of Santo Tomas with was his textbook on *Experimental Psychology*.<sup>19</sup> This has also been reinforced by his series of articles in the *Unitas* with the title "Naturaleza de la Afectividad," published in five parts.<sup>20</sup> As will be explained further, both of these works are in Psychology, as they

<sup>16</sup> See Licuanan, "Psychology in the Philippines," 67 with reference to Alvin Gaerlan, *General Psychology: Understanding Human Behavior* (Manila: National Bookstore, Inc., 1983).

<sup>17</sup> See Marissa Nicasio, "Angel de Blas, O.P. and the Development of Experimental Psychology in the Philippines," 618. The UST Department of Psychology, through their current website, however identifies 1938 as the year for this establishment.

<sup>18</sup> See Nigel Thomas, "Mental Imagery," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/mental-imagery/>>.

<sup>19</sup> Angel de Blas, OP. *Experimental Psychology* (Manila: UST Press, 1932). A reprint of this book again appeared in 1952 testifying that this text must have been consistently used for his instructions most probably when he teaches the course *Experimental Psychology* in the Ecclesiastical Faculty of Philosophy of the University. This course on Experimental Psychology (as separate from philosophical or rational psychology) remained in the curriculum for *Bachelor in Philosophy* degree even until the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that is, until the recent reforms in the study of Ecclesiastical Philosophy where this course was replaced with an introductory course on General Psychology.

<sup>20</sup> The first four parts were published in each issue of the *Unitas* from July to October 1933 (volume XII, nos. 1-4); then the last one was published in February of 1934 (*Unitas*, vol. XII, no. 7). These articles are published in the Spanish language and remained untranslated until now, unfortunately making it less accessible to researchers who are not proficient in the Spanish language. Moreover, it also seems that these serialized articles were the chapters of his doctoral dissertation because he distinguished these manuscripts from a book. He had this to say in the first paragraph of the first article in the series: "Nuestra intención en el presente trabajo es ocuparnos tan sólo de los segundos, y no con el fin de analizar todos los problemas que el tema de la afectividad encierra, pues es una disertación y no un libro lo que pretendemos escribir, sino que vamos a limitarnos a examinar tan sólo la idea misma de afectividad en su propia naturaleza o significado esencial [Angel de Blas, OP "Naturaleza de la Afectividad," in *Unitas* vol. XII, no. 1 (July 1933): 1]."

endeavored to dialogue with the then developments in the said field while asserting the relevance, even the superiority, of the views of Thomas Aquinas in understanding the human person. In these works, he had already hinted at an important question regarding the relationship between the stimuli received by the senses from the outside world and the psychical movements that happened inside the human person, and then the kind of reaction or behavior that the human person manifests in response. This certainly will generate questions about the extent that human freedom plays in our responses to the stimuli around us especially because Fr. de Blas already claimed that “irrespective of the identity, similarity or difference in nature we may deduce that since there is a relation between external stimulation and subjective reaction, when the stimuli and the reaction are similar or identical, the conscious process connecting them must also be identical or similar.”<sup>21</sup>

Hence, in his works on Psychology, he was attentive to the question of freedom, i.e., whether physiological processes are so programmed in such a way that we produce similar responses to similar stimuli. In responding to such important questions as this, he consistently held that the resources we could gather in the works of Aquinas could even provide more relevant answers than what the contemporary psychologists could offer.<sup>22</sup> In reading Father de Blas’ works then, there are two important biases that can hardly be denied: (1) he looks at the reality around him through the lens of his Catholic faith because he is in fact a Catholic priest; and (2) he is a follower of a specific philosophical tradition, the Thomist tradition, that serves as his lens in understanding the questions that confront him even as a Catholic thinker. As for the former, he admitted this openly in his justification for writing a textbook on *Experimental Psychology* even if there were already several textbooks available at that time. He unequivocally claimed in the book’s *Preface* that “the greatest of majority of such textbooks [that is, in *Experimental Psychology*] have been published by non-Catholic authors who not infrequently propose some doctrines not in exact conformity with the teachings of the Church, and it is not advisable to place those books in the hands of Catholic students.”<sup>23</sup> The latter is the reason why the methodology he employed in his work on ‘Naturaleza de la Afectividad’ is that of evaluating the contemporary developments in psychology ‘in the light of the principles and teachings’ of the prince of the Scholastics, Thomas Aquinas.<sup>24</sup> What

<sup>21</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 9.

<sup>22</sup> See a related point in footnote no. 8 above.

<sup>23</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, iii. It may be important to note that this worry is legitimated by the fact that the young students of the University need good Catholic foundations that would help them understand the then recent developments in the area of science and medicine. This is also most likely his response to Pope Leo XIII’s invitation in the *Aeterni Patris* (see *Aeterni Patris*, 31; see footnote no. 8 above).

<sup>24</sup> Para mayor claridad, dividiremos nuestro trabajo en dos partes: en la primera de las cuales expondremos, con la mayor exactitud y precisión que nos se posible, la doctrina de las diversas escuelas psicológicas sobre la afectividad; en la segunda analizaremos los resultados obtenidos bajo la

we see in the works of Fr. de Blas then is not a mere compilation of various views in Psychology as seen in an ordinary textbook, but is rather an evaluation that ends with a conclusion that the thoughts of Aquinas are as sturdy and valid as the works of these more recent authors.<sup>25</sup>

### **Fr. Angel de Blas on the Importance of Experimental Psychology**

One important claim of Father de Blas on Thomistic psychology was his boldness to say that Aquinas' views were not alien to the core tenets of 20th century Experimental Psychology. In fact, he claimed that Aquinas viewed Psychology as a natural science, so it must follow that it is for him an experimental science that must begin with the study of psychic phenomena based on how the senses present the extra-mental reality to the thinking subject.<sup>26</sup> Quite obviously, this claim brings some difficulties noting primarily that Aquinas lived at a time far removed from the development of the present-day clinical and Experimental Psychology. Yet, Father de Blas was convinced that since both the modern and the old views about the human person were looking into a common reality about the human person, the findings of Modern Psychology should not be construed as opposed and contradictory to what the ancient thinkers like Aquinas and Aristotle already held. In fact, he further claimed that the modern thinkers should not shy away from the philosophical reflections of the past, like the ones provided by Aquinas, and must instead be open to the possible contributions of their philosophical reflections because the refusal to do so would render the work of these contemporary psychologists incomplete.<sup>27</sup> This disposition to bring together the philosophical and the experimental components of psychology is the method of Father de Blas' continuing reflection as he pursued Thomistic psychology in the academic landscape of the University of Santo Tomas during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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luz de los principios y de las enseñanzas del príncipe de los escolásticos Santo Tomás [Ángel de Blas, "Naturaleza de la Afectividad," part I, chapter I," *Unitas*, vol. 12, no. 1 (July 1933): 4]. Henceforth, this work will be referred to as "Naturaleza I.1."

<sup>25</sup> "... todo esto lo suponemos nosotros conocido y averiguado, limitándonos tan solo a exponer los puntos de vista de Sto. Tomás sobre el particular, haciendo notar de paso la exacta conformidad que existe entre los postulados y conclusiones rigurosamente demostrados de la psicología moderna y las doctrinas del Doctor Angélico" (Ángel de Blas, "Naturaleza de la Afectividad, Part II," *Unitas*, vol. XII, no. 8 (February 1934): 586. Henceforth, this shall be referred to as "Naturaleza II."

<sup>26</sup> Siendo la Psicología una ciencia natural se sigue que, para Sto. Tomás, la Psicología es una ciencia eminentemente experimental, que debe comenzar por el estudio de los fenómenos psíquicos tal como los sentidos nos los manifiestan, y terminar, comprobando la exactitud de sus conclusiones, con los mismos datos de la experiencia (de Blas, "Naturaleza II," 580).

<sup>27</sup> Construir, por lo tanto, una psicología, aunque se la denomine empírica, que se limite al análisis de los hechos psíquicos puramente sin procurar dar razón de su naturaleza y de la causa que los engendra es quedarse a medio camino y privar a tal ciencia de su parte más importante, que es, la esencia de su propio objeto (de Blas, "Naturaleza II," 582).

It is no wonder then that his work in Thomistic psychology, as mentioned earlier, is seen more prominently in his textbook on *Experimental Psychology*; this must have been widely used in the University from the 1930s down to the second half of the century.<sup>28</sup> In this work, de Blas did not shy away from the challenge of mentioning, explaining, and even demonstrating the works of world-renowned psychologists like Wilhelm Wundt and the School of Leipzig, Oswald Kulpe and the School of Walzburg,<sup>29</sup> Ernst Heinrich Weber and Gustav Fechner among others.<sup>30</sup> Both this textbook and his *Naturaleza de la Afectividad* articles were filled with discussions on the experimentations done by contemporary psychologists where the roles of the bodily senses and organs in the process of cognition were explored and illustrated. Noting that the laboratory was not yet readily available, especially in the first publication of his textbook in the 1930s, he filled his textbook with drawings and illustrations<sup>31</sup> detailing the relevant bodily organs, especially the brain, and their functions in the cognitive process. In most of his expositions about the sense organs of the human body, he normally offered the following discussions: a) descriptions of the organ, b) discussions of how these organs contribute to the process of cognition where, in more than few instances, the discussions were accompanied by drawings and/or illustrations, c) narrations of the experimentations that were conducted to verify the functions of these organs, and these narrations are aptly accompanied by mentions of the leading scholars of the field, and the d) presentations of the anomalies and abnormalities that would justify the observed deviations from the expected reactions to certain stimuli. On several occasions, it seemed that Father de Blas argued for the universal structure of the human body and of human psychology and cognition. In the initial pages of his textbook, for example, he already argued for this and wrote:

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<sup>28</sup> I beg for the readers' indulgence for this conjecture but if we are to check the academic records available in the Ecclesiastical Faculties, for example, it appears that even until the early part of the year 2000s, Experimental Psychology is a course that is offered in the Bachelor in Philosophy curriculum separate from a course on Philosophical Psychology. Throughout this period, that is from the time of Fr. Angel de Blas' active teaching in the University of Santo Tomas until the end of the century, it seems that no other textbook on experimental psychology had been published by the UST Publishing house, and so the teaching of this subject especially for non-Psychology majors like the ones in the Faculty of Philosophy, must have had relied continuously on the materials that have been provided in this textbook, except of course on those areas in physiology and psychology that has already evolved because of the recent discoveries in these sciences. But, the philosophical component of the book, that is, the philosophical reflection on the physical and psychical powers of the human person, must have been utilized not just in the 1950s but even beyond.

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of the contributions of Kulpe and the Walzburg school, you may check Jurgen Kriz, "Oswald Kulpe and the Walzburg School from the Perspective of Modern Systems Theory," in J. Škilters, F. Toccafondi, & G. Stemberger (Eds.), *Complex Cognition and Qualitative Science: A Legacy of Oswald Külpe*. Riga: University of Latvia Press, no date.

<sup>30</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 17.

<sup>31</sup> see de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, vii and viii.



We admit that conscious processes, being something internal and subjective, can be directly experienced only by the subject that develops them. This does not mean, however, that they are entirely beyond the field of analysis and experimentation, and that, in regard to their nature and manner of production, we cannot draw universal conclusions applicable in a general way to all the conscious processes of the same kind, whoever the individual in whom they are realized may be.<sup>32</sup>

The above quote was his justification for a claim that it is possible to treat psychology as a natural science. For Father de Blas, human cognition can be and should be studied scientifically, where the “complexity of such conscious processes makes it necessary for us to separate them into their elements, after the method of the chemical sciences, in which compound bodies are analyzed and divided into their simplest components, thus making possible a thorough study of their nature and interrelations.”<sup>33</sup> He further justified this by arguing for the possibility of analyzing the objectivity of human emotional responses. He further claims that, “in dealing with conscious beings of the same nature, we can prove that when the stimulus is the same and the circumstances of stimulation are identical, the conscious processes internally developed necessarily must be of the same kind.”<sup>34</sup>

Evidently, this claim posed another difficulty which Father de Blas himself realized and had to contend with. He understood that his claim warranted the need to explain the difference observed among individuals. He did this not simply by pointing out, as mentioned above, the anomalies and pathologies which the human organs related to sensation and cognition may suffer, but also by talking about the role of the human body in the development of individual differences. He provided his answer to the question about individual differences when he delivered an inaugural lecture in front of the academic body of the University of Santo Tomas in 1941. The said lecture was given the title “The Modern and Thomistic Views Regarding the Constitution of Psychological Personality.” Its text was published by *Unitas* in August of that year.<sup>35</sup>

In his effort to present a scientific analysis of human sensation and cognition, Father de Blas presented a rigorous discussion about the following: external sensations and the organs that make them possible, cutaneous sensations and the importance of the sense of touch,<sup>36</sup> the sensations of taste and smell, and the

<sup>32</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 8.

<sup>33</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 14.

<sup>34</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 8.

<sup>35</sup> Angel de Blas, “The Modern and Thomistic Views Regarding the Constitution of Psychological Personality,” *Unitas*, vol. 20, no. 2 (August 1941): 118-130.

<sup>36</sup> Fr. de Blas here emphasizes the importance of the sense of touch as the universal sense among all sentient beings. This is clearly anchored on Aristotle’s discussion in the *De Anima* where he said

auditory and visual sensations. Twenty-first century readers would understandably contend that these pages in the textbook of Father de Blas needed revisions because of the development in the science of Physiology, and Clinical and Experimental Psychology, that we have achieved so far. He was writing at a time when explicit studies on sensation and cognition were still conducted in the limited number of laboratories around the world. This should have been one of the reasons why he worked hard so that the University of Santo Tomas could devote its resources in putting up its own psychology laboratory. Even if such a laboratory had to start with simple apparatuses, it was a monument that testified to the belief about the importance of experimentation in the improvement of our understanding of the human person.

However, Fr. Angel de Blas' work did not stop with the study of sensations and its organs. He devoted the latter portions of his book to a more philosophical discussion of human cognition, and it is here where he resorted to his training in Philosophy, particularly in the Thomist tradition. While the work of another Dominican, Fr. Robert Edward Brennan, OP, *Thomistic Psychology: A Philosophic Analysis of the Nature of Man*,<sup>37</sup> had a more global reception and was widely used by students and professors in the course on Philosophical Psychology, Father de Blas provided a Thomistic lens in his own classes in *Experimental Psychology* conducted in the University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines.

### **Father Angel de Blas' Thomistic Philosophical Psychology**

While Father de Blas was centrally concerned with the study of Psychology as a natural science, his method remained aligned with the classical philosophical approach in psychology and so his works are fundamentally philosophical and more importantly Thomistic. In many parts of his discussion, he endeavored to apply the dominant methodology of many Thomist in the University of Santo Tomas at that time, which was, to analyze the veracity of the recent developments of Experimental

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that, "the primary form of sense is touch which belongs to all animals" (Aristotle, *De Anima*, 413b), and he would further add that "some classes of animals have all the senses, some only certain of them, others only one, the most indispensable, touch" (Aristotle, *De Anima*, 414a). In his chapter on cutaneous sensations, Fr. de Blas also talked about especially the sensation of pain (see de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 34ff). Fr. de Blas did not elaborate this point but a further investigation of some of the thoughts that he mentioned could help us reflect further on the nature of our desires and aversions, and how would these desires and aversions affect our appreciation of what we could and should pursue as our ends and purposes as human individuals. It is even more relevant to talk about pleasure and pain in the section on cutaneous sensation because, as Fr. de Blas also affirmed, the sense of touch is a universal and important sensation, the appreciation of which is simply diminished because of the greater attention we give to our other senses, especially the sense of sight (see de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 56).

<sup>37</sup> Robert Edward Brennan, OP. *Thomistic Psychology: A Philosophic Analysis of the Nature of Man* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1941).

Psychology through the lens of the teachings of Thomas Aquinas.<sup>38</sup> Below are some of the themes that illustrate his Thomistic understanding of the concepts that are deemed central even in Experimental Psychology.

### *On perception*

One topic which occupied Father de Blas, and which provided him the opportunity to go back to the thoughts of Thomas Aquinas, was the one on ‘perception.’ In his discussion, he made a comparison between the ancient and modern psychologists because they agreed on the necessity of the *transmission* of the objects of sensation to the proper sensory areas of the cerebral cortex.<sup>39</sup> But then, he pointed out, modern psychologists disagreed with Aquinas on the issue about the locality of sensation which for the modern psychologists happened in the brain while Aquinas argued that, according to Father de Blas, “external sensation is realized by the receptors themselves” even before it reaches the brain, that is, “the brain *perceives* that the eyes see, the ears hear, and the cold and pain spots feel cold and pain.”<sup>40</sup>

Regardless of whether Father de Blas has accurately described Aquinas’ position here or not, it is clear, however, that by highlighting the question about the relationship of the receptors and the brain, he had already discussed the now popular distinction in Psychology between sensation and perception. The insistence on assigning the sense receptors, instead of the brain, as the locality where sensation happens, which for Father de Blas is the advantage of Aquinas’ psychology, provides a better opportunity for him to explain the role of the internal senses and the faculty of reason in the process of human cognition. He explained that “external sensation does not account for the perception of the difference existing between the adequate stimuli of the different external sense,”<sup>41</sup> and because of this, there is a need to posit for an internal sense<sup>42</sup> that is responsible for the comparison and differentiation of the various sensations that are received by the sense organs. Moreover, even the comparison and differentiation performed by internal sensation were only of rudimentary and imperfect nature because the process “implies the perception of

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<sup>38</sup> We again acknowledge here the potential difficulties of this methodology mainly because the laws of natural sciences have developed quite remarkably since the time of Aquinas. What is clear however is the boldness of Fr. de Blas, not just in arguing with the recent discoveries of scientists but also in testing the classical wisdom of Aquinas when cited in opposition to these recent discoveries.

<sup>39</sup> see de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 187.

<sup>40</sup> see de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 188. Fr. de Blas also offered a whole chapter to review the positions of modern psychologists on this particular issue (see de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 264-277). He seems to have however become ambivalent here about the position of Aquinas on this question by saying that Aquinas admitted “the localization of the sensory and motor functions in the brain” (de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 266).

<sup>41</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 190.

<sup>42</sup> He would say that the “perception, therefore, of the adequate stimuli of the external sense as different from one another pertains to internal sensation” (de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 191).

the relation that the parts bear to the whole,” which is universal in character and is therefore “beyond the perceptive capacity of any cognitive organic faculty, as both the internal and external senses are.”<sup>43</sup> The completion of this conscious process then has to be done via a faculty that is immaterial and spiritual and this will pave the way for the discussion of the faculty of the intellect. True to his Thomistic-Aristotelian training, Father de Blas argued that the perfection of human perception is found in the exercise of human reason, which allows better intellectual understanding than the animals. He emphasized that:

Sensitive conscious processes in man are very similar in function to the sensitive conscious processes of animals, but on account of the influence of reason upon them, they very seldom function as purely sensitive processes since reason usually directs their activity. Hence, in man even sensitive association is of a *controlled type*, either because association itself is made voluntary or because the selection of one of the terms of the association *depends upon the will*. Thus, we sometimes associate two actual stimuli not because they *should be really associated* but because *we want to associate them*.<sup>44</sup>

While asserting the perfection that is proper to the human person by virtue of his reason, Father de Blas argued that despite the universal structure of the human senses resulting to similar processes in sensitive cognition, the higher faculties of the human person, which are, the intellect and will, allow us to make choices, and they are therefore responsible for our freedom as human persons, and would account for our differences as individuals.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 191.

<sup>44</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 223-224. Emphases were added in order to highlight the ‘will’ in the act of associating those stimuli signifying that this is not mere sensitive comprehension but an intellectual one.

<sup>45</sup> Fr. de Blas’ answer to this question on individual differences however is intriguing but this is something that I could not deal with here in detail. In the texts of Fr. de Blas, the issue on human freedom and choice are not fully explored, and when he talked about individual differences, he would rather refer to Peter Lombard’s claim in the Sentences, Book II, Distinction 32: “Unde patet quod ex diversitate corporis animarum diversitas resultat” (see de Blas, “The Modern and Thomistic Views,” 192). The way the argument develops however seems to lean more on the ‘essentialist,’ if not physicalist, understanding of the nature of the human person. He would make references to bodily temperament and would even talk about the ‘temperamental disposition of the *brain*’ as determinants of the perfection of the internal senses like imagination, memory, and the estimative sense. He would moreover give preference to texts like “those who have hard flesh and in consequence a poor sense of touch are mentally deficient; but those who possess a soft flesh and a perfect sense of touch are highly gifted mentally” (see de Blas, “The Modern and Thomistic Views,” 193). Fr. de Blas was not specifically addressing the nurture-nature discourse, but I wonder how texts like this would shed light to such debate. It must be said however that Fr. de Blas does not disregard the argument for ‘nurture’ as he himself also makes references to the Thomistic-Aristotelian discussion about habits and habituation, and would even claim that habits acquired through repeated performance of an action can be called natural (see de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 329).

*On instincts*

The distinction between the human and non-human animals was again highlighted by Father de Blas in his discussion about instincts.<sup>46</sup> Father de Blas cited the experiments conducted on animals like birds, chickens, and kittens, and announced that “these experiments prove that nature has endowed these animals with all the necessary motor nervous connections to spontaneously perform such functions in the presence of adequate sensory stimuli without the need of previous observation and training.”<sup>47</sup> This was taken by those who did these studies, and even by Father de Blas himself, as indication that there is, in animals including us humans, a ‘natural impulse,’ which can be called as “instincts.” He also pointed out that despite the denial of some modern psychologists on the presence of instincts among humans, there eventually emerged a ‘general acceptance of the existence of human instincts.’<sup>48</sup> Yet, he immediately added that “the influence of reason upon the internal sensation of man makes the study of pure instincts in human nature difficult.”<sup>49</sup> While Father de Blas did not make explicit reference to Aquinas when he discussed the classification of instincts as: a) individual instincts, further classified into biological and psychical, b) racial instincts, and c) social instincts, it is clear that his discussion on instincts are influenced by what Aquinas provided in the *Prima secundae* of *Summa Theologiae*, interestingly under the heading on natural law, where Aquinas referred to at least three natural inclinations of the human person.

The individual instincts, in the presentation of Father de Blas, are primarily needed for the survival of individual animals, both human and non-human, as these instincts allow them to pursue things needed to satisfy their necessities and to avoid those that are harmful for them. Father de Blas here talked about nutritive instincts, protective and repugnance instincts, instinctive fear, and instinctive flight among others. In the *Summa*, Aquinas also spoke of the instinct for self-preservation since, Aquinas said, “every substance seeks the preservation of its own being, according to its nature: and by reason of this inclination, whatever is a means of preserving human life, and of warding off its obstacles.”<sup>50</sup> Moreover, Father de Blas also spoke of racial instincts, which “provide for the continuation of the species.”<sup>51</sup> Racial instincts then correspond to the second type of human inclination identified by Aquinas “‘which nature has taught to all animals,’ such as sexual intercourse, education of offspring and so forth.”<sup>52</sup> Father de Blas further explained here that among animals, both human and non-human, instinctive fear and instinctive fighting

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<sup>46</sup> see de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 239ff.

<sup>47</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 240.

<sup>48</sup> see de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 240.

<sup>49</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 240.

<sup>50</sup> ST I-II, q. 94, art. 2.

<sup>51</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 244.

<sup>52</sup> ST I-II, q. 94, art. 2.

were not just inclinations to preserve the self (individual instincts) but were also instincts to preserve the offspring and therefore the whole species (racial instincts). Lastly, Father de Blas spoke of social instincts which were directed towards the “care for the needs of the community, and may deal with useful or harmful apprehensions for the welfare of the group.”<sup>53</sup> This corresponds to Aquinas’ second component of the third natural inclination of the human person who, for Aquinas, has a natural inclination to know the truth about God, and *to live in society*. The instincts that dispose animals, including human animals, to live in a community would include, according to Fr. de Blas, the instincts of sociability and sympathy.<sup>54</sup>

Father de Blas’ discussion on instincts identified three theories about the origin of instincts, namely, (1) the habit transmission theory; (2) the natural selection theory; and (3) the fixed species theory.<sup>55</sup> He would classify the first two under the common heading of organic evolution theory, which he would contrast to the third one. While Father de Blas was not decisive as to which of these opposed theories would he favor, he argued clearly that the talk of instincts finds a home in an argument which posits that “every species of animals was created with a definite nature and definite instincts which were transmitted through generations to its respective offsprings (*sic*).”<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, Father de Blas speaks of instincts as the locus for the integral functions of *affection, cognition, and agent’s motor skills*. He stated that “instinctive movements must be determined by some cognitive and affective process in conformity with the general psychical law according to which *every conscious movement is produced by a definite affection and every affection by an adequate cognitive act*.”<sup>57</sup> He further elaborated this saying that “both animals and man meet situations that require a quick reaction to save their lives, and for these reactions nature has endowed them with inherited cognitive, affective, and motor functions that from the very beginning of their existence impel them to act rapidly and without hesitation and with all the probabilities of success.”<sup>58</sup>

<sup>53</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 246.

<sup>54</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 246.

<sup>55</sup> see de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 247.

<sup>56</sup> see de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 248. Even contemporary scientific studies, including studies on genes, are tentative about their conclusions regarding the link between behavior and nature among animal species. In a fairly recent study, J. Roman Arguello and Richard Benton argue about the importance of dealing with the question on instincts because “we’re getting very good at observing and quantifying behavior,” and “this ability will allow us to determine causal relationships—and not simply correlations—between genetic and behavioral variation.” Yet, they also affirm that “despite impressive advances, we’re still a long way from understanding the genetic and neural basis of even simple behaviors” [J. Roman Arguello and Richard Benton, “Open questions: Tackling Darwin’s “instincts”: the genetic basis of behavioral evolution,” in *BMC Biology* (2017) 15:26, 1 of 3]. If this is the status of the question in our time, despite the significant advances in experimental psychology, then we could only surmise the difficulty of answering this question during Fr. de Blas’ time.

<sup>57</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 240 – emphasis in the original.

<sup>58</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 243.

Though Fr. de Blas did not elaborate on the implications of this claim to the morality of human persons, this line of argument however provided a potent foundation for the reflection on how human persons make and carry out their decisions. The *integral relations* of the cognitive, affective, and motor powers in an animal instinct allows us to see that even human persons would instinctively act on something that has been perceived by the intellect as true and appreciated by the will as good, therefore has affectionately drawn the appetite. So, the autonomous conduct of human actions cannot be isolated from human cognition as if it is possible for one to believe something and yet act on contrary because of the opposite pull of the human will. Even in instances when our passions have become so powerful that they seem to have overshadowed our judgment, if an act is to be free, it would always entail a degree of awareness by the intellect about the nature of the action to be performed.

Father de Blas' discussion on instincts as the locus for the integral functions of affection, cognition, and agent's motor skills allows us to see that the will could not be opposed to reason. The will simply inclines the appetite to something that reason has presented to it so that even in the act of sinning, one's motor skills are activated because of the affection that results from an intellectual appetite produced by one's apprehension of the sin as an apparent good at that particular moment. Father de Blas rejected the opinion that instincts are devoid of the agent's awareness of the finality of such instincts. Even in animals which do not exercise reason, instincts align their motor skills and affection with their sensation. A human person, moreover, "is aware of the finality of instincts not on account of the instincts themselves but by reason of his intellectual knowledge."<sup>59</sup> This is why, in Aquinas, law and morality are connected because natural law is closely linked to the nature of the human person. Every human person has the instinct to understand, desire, and actualize the internal decisions that his intellect and will have arrived at. In cases then when one or two members of the community fail to decide correctly by virtue of his apprehension of an evil as an apparent good, the law could become an instrument that will help the human agent form both his reason and affection so he correctly understands the moral quality of his actions. Obviously, contemporary human societies rarely appreciate the connection of law and morality in this way and so contemporary culture now creates a wall between the realms not just of instincts and reason, but more so of law and morality.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>59</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 243.

<sup>60</sup> At the end of his discussion on instincts, like his previous discussions on the sense organs, Fr. de Blas talked about the 'abnormalities' of instincts where he mentioned several types of 'phobias.' But his discussion on 'racial instincts' would most likely offend advocates of contemporary popular culture, especially those who advocate for contemporary gender theories, because Fr. de Blas would consider as abnormalities of racial instincts those "deviations from the normal strength of sexual lust, deviations from the normal objects of sexual pleasure and the deviations caused by a transference

*On memory and its role in the realization of our instincts*

In his discussion about ‘memory’ as an internal sense, Fr. de Blas mentions ‘two formalities in images,’ that is, image as product of imagination and image as perceived by memory. He further said that memory has as its proper function “the identification of an image with its corresponding object perceived as existing in past time.”<sup>61</sup> As an internal sense, memory is possessed even by non-human animals as shown by the example of a dog wagging its tail in excitement upon seeing its master who has been away for some time. He, moreover, quickly added that human persons have the capacity to acquire a definite recollection of something or someone, that is, a more definite recollection of images, and so we associate our recollections of things and persons with particular dates and time,<sup>62</sup> while the memory of a non-human animal is more generic, that is, a perception of an image acquired by a past sensation as manifested when an animal associates its present encounter with the master who has just arrived from a long absence with the previous encounters he once had with the same master. Without memory in animals, such excitement caused by the present encounter would not have been possible.

These assertions clearly find their moorings in the thoughts of Aquinas who claims that memory is among the internal senses that contribute to the formation of ‘intentions’ in animals. He would further claim that animals could possibly have intentions even if they are simply limited to sensitive cognition.<sup>63</sup> This is for example seen in the actions of birds when they gather straws and sticks in order to build a nest, or an animal’s natural reaction to avoid a predator. Aquinas explained that these intentions were formed among animals because of their internal senses, memory foremost among them. For example, birds have the instincts to build nest not only because they find ‘nest-building’ pleasurable but also because their internal sense, particularly memory, have allowed them to associate the straws and sticks not with the pleasure but with the usefulness of the nest. With his emphasis on instincts as products of threefold processes of cognition, affection, and action, it appears

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of sexual pleasure from its natural objects to objects with different aims” (de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 252) thus anchoring the Catholic teachings on sexual ethics and gender. This is an important point to make, however, because contemporary culture often portrays sexual desires and pleasures as devoid of proper measures. But, as Fr. de Blas has pointed out, such desires are part of our racial instincts and as human persons, as with animals, we are endowed with racial instincts for the purpose of perpetuating our species, and so our instincts towards our sexual activities should not be separated from their proper ends. This means that in the pursuit of his racial instincts, an agent’s cognition of its nature and purpose is closely linked to his sexual desire (affection) that would also move him to pursue certain sets of actions. Human racial instincts then could not but be reasonable because this is part of human nature as intellectual beings, and by being reasonable, even human instincts, including racial instincts, are bound by the measures commensurate to their finality or end.

<sup>61</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 254.

<sup>62</sup> Fr. de Blas explains that Aquinas’ term for human recollection is reminiscence (see ST I, q. 78, a 4).

<sup>63</sup> see ST I, q. 78, a. 4.



that Father de Blas thought of animal instinctive movements like nest-building as conditioned by the sensitive apprehension and affection of utility and harm, and not simply of pleasure and pain. The former pair would highlight the importance of internal sensations even in animals. Animals are instinctively moved to approach or avoid an object not simply because of the stimuli of pleasure and pain produced by the present sensation, but also by their awareness of the potential benefit or harm which can only be aroused by the animal's immediate recognition of an image that has been stored in the internal sense of memory acquired through a sensation in the past. This is aligned with what Aquinas said:

Animals, therefore, need to perceive such intentions, which the exterior sense does not perceive. And some distinct principle is necessary for this ... for the apprehension of intentions which are not received through the senses, the "estimative" power is appointed: and for the preservation thereof, the "memorative" power, which is a storehouse of such-like intentions. A sign of which we have in the fact that the principle of memory in animals is found in some such intention, for instance, that something is harmful or otherwise. And the very formality of the past, which memory observes, is to be reckoned among these intentions.<sup>64</sup>

The integration of cognition, affection and action, moreover, is truer in the case of human beings, for as Aquinas teaches, "other animals perceive these intentions only by some natural instinct, while man perceives them by means of a coalition of ideas."<sup>65</sup> As I have endeavored to show here, even in Aquinas and certainly in the text of Father de Blas, the understanding of instincts could not be separated from cognition because the natural instincts of animals include the sensitive cognition especially through the internal senses as shown above. This is true in both human and non-human animals. The insistence on the finality of instincts in the human person is one of the crucial claims we could see in the text of Father de Blas, something which is worthy of consideration even by contemporary readers of philosophical psychology and ethics. Father de Blas categorically argued that 'instincts' were important components of our being human, and he opposed the view that degraded human instincts because they were thought to be indicative of the agents' lack of awareness of their ends. Instead, Father de Blas argued on the contrary, instincts are motivated by intentions, and even non-human animals have reasons for action through their internal senses including memory, imagination, and estimative powers. As shown above, intentions in animals are a doctrine that is now slowly increasingly affirmed by many modern scholars on animal psychology.

<sup>64</sup> ST I, q. 78, a. 4. Aquinas, and Fr. de Blas following him, antedates here many of the more scientific contemporary findings about the presence of intentions in animals [see Angelica Kaufman, "Animal Mental Action: Planning Among Chimpanzees, *Rev.Phil.Psych.*, 6 (2015): 745-760. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13164-014-0228-x>].

<sup>65</sup> ST I, q. 78, a. 4.

It is important to note, however, that despite the assertion of ‘instincts’ in human beings, Father de Blas did not diminish the importance of human freedom, and this could be seen in the importance that he placed on the distinctive reasoning capacities possessed by human beings. If instincts require the integration of cognition, affection, and action even if the cognition referred to in this process is that of sensitive cognition, then the difference in the cognitive process between non-human animals (clearly argued to be limited only to sensitive apprehension and so they do not have the faculties of the intellect and the will) and humans would mark the difference. In Aquinas’ text that we have examined above, he clearly argued that the presence of reason in the human person marks the difference even in the exercise of the powers of the internal senses between human and non-human animals. I am again quoting Aquinas here in length:

Therefore the power by which in other animals is called the natural estimative, in man is called the “cogitative,” which by some sort of collation discovers these intentions. Wherefore it is also called the “particular reason,” to which medical men assign a certain particular organ, namely, the middle part of the head: for it compares individual intentions, just as the intellectual reason compares universal intentions. As to the memorative power, man has not only memory, as other animals have in the sudden recollection of the past; but also “reminiscence” by syllogistically, as it were, seeking for a recollection of the past by the application of individual intentions.<sup>66</sup>

Admittedly, this text is taken from Aquinas’ response to the questions about the number of internal senses and the distinctions among these internal senses, and is therefore not directly intended to address the question of the difference between human and non-human animal instincts. Yet, the text is clear in its assertion that internal sensation between human and non-human animals, even if they both address the sensible forms, are not the same. This point has also been clearly presented in Father de Blas’ own text:

Now a man develops immediate recognition as animals do. He has, furthermore, the power to change indefinite into definite recognition through a process of *controlled inquiry* by means of which he tries to recall the associates that may help him in identifying the element he has not been able to recognize at first. Such *inquisitive power*, however, does not pertain to sensitive memory of man as a natural property but it is derived from the influence of human reason and human will exercised over all our sensitive functions.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> ST I, q. 78, a. 4.

<sup>67</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 256.

## Fr. Angel de Blas on the nature of affectivity

Reading the discussion provided in the previous section, one could think that there might be important themes in Psychology, especially Thomistic Psychology, that were missing, most notably the matters about the human soul and the powers of the intellectual soul.<sup>68</sup> In the texts of Father de Blas, he clearly regarded the human person as being endowed with the faculty of reason, and this was at the background of his discussion on the powers that were mentioned in the previous section. Yet, Father de Blas did not offer a separate section on the topic of the intellect, and did not probe this issue in detail, because his primary concern in his publications was to talk about our sensitive powers and how they relate with the human person's physiological conditions (hence, the talk about sense organs and the localization even of the internal senses) and the human person's psychical functions, which are clearly intellectual in nature, that is, as opposed to the purely sensitive nature of the non-human animals. It may be worthwhile to note that understanding the human person through his emotions and affections has drawn the interests of many recent writers especially those who are looking into the role of desires or emotions in the moral life of the human person.<sup>69</sup> In the works of Father de Blas, the intellectual nature of the human person is taken as an uncontroversial claim, but what merits a closer examination, he thought, is the nature of our affective state.<sup>70</sup> I would even argue that this is one important area which makes Father de Blas relevant in current discussions not just in Psychology but even in Moral Philosophy.

Father de Blas, following the thoughts of Aquinas, reiterated that cognition precedes affection, and that our affective states could be divided into two: sensitive affection and the rational appetite.<sup>71</sup> He provided a review of thinkers from Plato

<sup>68</sup> In comparison with the text of his contemporary, the Dominican Fr. Robert Brennan, OP who also published a book on Thomistic psychology (cf. footnote 37 above), the latter provided separate chapters on 'the intellectual knowledge of man' and the 'volitional life of man,' while Fr. de Blas did not devote particular discussions on these. The reason I see here is that Fr. de Blas does not really intend to provide a text on philosophical psychology but on experimental psychology, which by its nature is oriented to the study of the body, its organs and their role in the psychical function of the human person. This will hopefully show that Fr. de Blas' objectives are different from most Thomist textbooks in philosophical psychology, and so even if his views are authentically Thomist in orientation, his primary focus is on sensitive cognition and affection.

<sup>69</sup> Fr. Nicholas Lombardo, OP claims that 'interest in Aquinas's account of emotion is growing,' and his own work is also a contribution to this growing literature on Aquinas' views about emotions (see Nicholas Lombardo, OP, *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion*, 4).

<sup>70</sup> He said, "en el fondo, toda esta confusión es el reflejo de la falta de una doctrina precisa sobre la naturaleza de los estados afectivos: lo que, como Külpe había notado hace largo tiempo, es a su vez consecuencia de la falta de acuerdo sobre los criterios para distinguir los estado afectivos, Los autores, acordes al admitir algunos caracteres como propios de los estados afectivos, son de distinto parecer cuando se trata de su interpretación, y sobre todo se separan al monitor o no, otros caracteres como exclusivos de tales estados" (de Blas, 'Naturaleza I.1,' 2).

<sup>71</sup> "Como principio general sostienen la necesidad de que el conocimiento preceda a los estados afectivos, y cómo distinguen dos clases de facultades cognoscitivas, sensitiva una, que se limita a lo

down to the Scottish school, and in this review, he presented the philosophers' views on affection and their answers to such questions as whether there are two types of appetite: the sensitive and the rational. After this review, he identified several theories on affection and grouped these historical thinkers according to major classifications.<sup>72</sup> One school of thought was named by Father de Blas as the intellectualistic tradition, which flourished in the seventeenth century through Descartes and Locke, even if it has traces since the ancient times and the Middle Ages through Diogenes Laërtius and Jean Buridan.<sup>73</sup> Included in this list were Baruch Spinoza, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, David Hume, Herbart, Hegel, Freud, and few more others. Father de Blas summarized this theory as claiming that "affectivity and affections are not independent conscious states different from sensations and ideas, but forms of knowledge determined by the manner sensations and ideas impress us."<sup>74</sup> He, however, rejected this view as already obsolete and was no longer followed by any contemporary psychologist who may be worthy of the name. He explained that "the affective tone-like sensation has the attributes of quality, intensity, duration but none of these attributes can be reduced to the corresponding attributes of sensation nor of any form of cognitive process."<sup>75</sup> The next group is referred to by Father de Blas as the physiological theories that include the views of Carlos Lange, William James, Théodule-Armand Ribot, Walter Cannon, and Gregorio Marañon among others. Father de Blas claimed that these thinkers view affectivity as "essentially constituted by the awareness of the physiological changes excited in our body through the influence of sensation."<sup>76</sup> He claimed that this was a product of too much emphasis placed by biological sciences on the relation of physiological functions to facts of consciousness thus reducing Psychology to simple analysis and comparison of somatic phenomena and their influence to conscious phenomena.<sup>77</sup> Father de Blas presented T.A. Ribot as saying that "affectivity is based on natural

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particular y concreto, y otra racional, el entendimiento, que se extiende a lo universal o abstracto, distinguen también lógicamente dos especies de facultades afectivas, una sensitiva, consecuencia de la percepción sensible, llamada apetito sensitivo, u otra racional, efecto de la intelección, denominada apetito superior o voluntad" (de Blas, "Naturaleza I.1," 6).

<sup>72</sup> He identified these schools of thought as follows: the intellectualist theories, the physiological theory, the psycho-physical theory and the psycho-physiological theory (see de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 280).

<sup>73</sup> See Ángel de Blas, "Naturaleza de la Afectividad, capítulo II," *Unitas*, vol. 12, no. 0002 (August 1933): 107.

<sup>74</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 280.

<sup>75</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 306-307.

<sup>76</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 286.

<sup>77</sup> El progreso de las ciencias biológicas, juntamente con el horror a la generalización, ha hecho que se dé demasiada, o casi exclusiva importancia a la relación de las funciones fisiológicas con los hechos de conciencia, lo que ha dado por resultado, el olvido el elemento psíquico, reduciendo así la psicología a simple análisis y comparación de las inmutaciones somáticas, y a su influencia, como causas determinantes de la aparición de los fenómenos de conscientes [Ángel de Blas, "Naturaleza de la Afectividad, capítulo III," *Unitas*, vol. 12, no. 0003 (September 1933): 195].

tendencies, instincts, and desires, and these processes are spontaneous and *precedes* knowledge.”<sup>78</sup> Father de Blas however rejected this view because for him “affectivity is an intermediate psychological phenomenon between cognition and its bodily manifestations.”<sup>79</sup> The next group is called by Father de Blas as the psychophysical theories on affectivity which hold that “affections and the neuro-vascular phenomena that accompany the affective state are the same unique reality viewed under two different aspects.”<sup>80</sup> Included in this group are Wilhelm Wundt and Oswald Kulpe. Father de Blas, however, criticized them saying that their theories “are all based on a wrong supposition, namely, the possibility of a unique reality being at the same time physical and psychological.”<sup>81</sup> The last group of theories, Father de Blas did classify as the psychophysiological theories which claimed that “sensitive affections are the result of two different principles, one physiological and the other psychological both of which cooperate in their production.”<sup>82</sup> Particularly the scholastic proponents of this view agreed that sensitive affectivity was a “psychophysiological unit in which both the activity of the body and the activity of the soul share its part.”<sup>83</sup> Father de Blas would then say that the “psychophysiological theories of affectivity seem to us more reasonable and more in conformity with experience.”<sup>84</sup>

Following his affirmation of the Thomistic doctrine on affections, Father de Blas claimed that Aquinas’ doctrine was capable of answering even the contemporary questions on Psychology and Moral Philosophy. One important principle that has to be reiterated is the Thomist claim that “no affection can be developed unless preceded by a perception.”<sup>85</sup> This leads to a further claim that rejects both the existence of a pure affective state and an indifferent affective state. He later reiterated the above principle when he said that “affections depend upon the perception of an object as either pleasurable or unpleasurable”<sup>86</sup> and there are also no sensations that are not either pleasant or unpleasant.<sup>87</sup>

This principle then implies that our apprehension of the reality around us arouses our affections, which will lead us into action, and that our actions presuppose certain types of affections that can only be aroused through a prior cognitive activity. Hence, it is important for us to sharpen our apprehension of the reality around us by carefully discerning the question of pleasantness and unpleasantness, and the

<sup>78</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 287 – emphasis added.

<sup>79</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 307.

<sup>80</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 293-294.

<sup>81</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 308.

<sup>82</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 299.

<sup>83</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 304.

<sup>84</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 308.

<sup>85</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 309. This is an affirmation of what Aquinas said, “good is not the object of the appetite except as apprehended” (ST I-II, q. 27, a.2).

<sup>86</sup> de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 318.

<sup>87</sup> See de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 320.

question of usefulness and harm, because they would influence both our affections and actions. Father de Blas, following Aquinas, acknowledged the power of our affection and how it moved us to action as he claimed, that the agent “*y si finalmente, excitado el sujeto por ese deseo de posesión realiza todos los esfuerzos necesarios para conseguir el fin o llegar al término que se ha propuesto, todas las energías desplegadas formarán lo que comúnmente es conocido con el nombre de funciones motoras o locomotivas.*”<sup>88</sup> This is again an affirmation of what Aquinas said in the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*, that is, “every animal is moved for the purpose of realizing its desires and intentions.”<sup>89</sup>

Another important claim forwarded by Father de Blas was that ‘the tendencies or inclinations are the roots of all psychic functions.’<sup>90</sup> He was convinced that the human body is so structured for us to address our natural inclinations. So, our senses are our access to the external world, and we have the internal senses and the intellect that will afford us with an understanding of the world as encountered by the external senses, and such understanding arouses our affection and moves us to action. He even claimed that “God and nature have organized the human body with the best possible temperament so that it would be a worthy host of the human soul.”<sup>91</sup> Father de Blas, moreover, added that the faculties of the human body respond to the necessity of a natural tendency or inclination, and that the natural ends of these faculties are the faculties’ determined objects, that is, the sufficient and formal reasons for their functions.<sup>92</sup> This suggests that the doctrine of the natural inclinations can be an important guide in our understanding of those things that are proper for us human persons, and this question can even be aided by our investigation of the capacities of our faculties because those that our natural faculties provide, manifested by their functions to satisfy our fundamental inclinations as human persons, can also be indicative of our nature as human persons.

### **Conclusion: Fr. Angel de Blas, OP and Thomism in UST**

On the question of the continuing study and relevance of Thomas Aquinas’ thought in the University of Santo Tomas, Manila, this paper shows that Father de

<sup>88</sup> de Blas, “Naturaleza II,” 588.

<sup>89</sup> ST I, q. 78, a.1. Fr. de Blas refers to this too when he claims that “affectivity, as St. Thomas Aquinas says, is the determinant cause of controlled movement. Whenever we move, we do it for the purpose of attaining something pleasurable or useful or with the intention of avoiding what has been perceived as unpleasurable or harmful” (de Blas, *Experimental Psychology*, 316-317).

<sup>90</sup> de Blas, “Naturaleza II,” p. 588. He quoted Aquinas here as a reference, ST II-II, q. 155, a.2. where it was said that “natural inclinations are the principles of all supervening inclinations.”

<sup>91</sup> de Blas, “The Modern and Thomistic Views,” 127.

<sup>92</sup> “Cada facultad por consiguiente responde a la necesidad de una tendencia o inclinación natural, tendencia que se manifiesta en el hecho observado experimentalmente de estar toda facultad primariamente necesitada a un objeto determinado que es la razón suficiente y formal de todas las funciones por ella ejecutadas siempre que obran sobre cualquier objeto” (de Blas, *Naturaleza II*, 589).

Blas, OP contributed significantly to the Thomist tradition through his engagements in the University during the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Evidently, 20<sup>th</sup> century Thomism is very much alive in the University of Santo Tomas because of his contributions together with the works of the other Friars teaching in the University. Father de Blas' pioneering efforts in the discipline of Psychology has lasting effects as seen in the very vibrant Psychology department of the University. However, I wonder how much of his legacy has remained both in the classroom conversations and research in the departments of Philosophy and Psychology, but it is worthwhile to consider revisiting his works and studying them so we could further the conversations that he once had initiated. It may be important to consider inserting his Thomist views in the core-curriculum of both the undergraduate and graduate classes, that is, specifically invoking him, for example, in the requisite Philosophy courses of these programs. Father de Blas' "Naturaleza de la Afectividad" remains in the original Spanish language making it less accessible to many contemporary readers in the University who are no longer schooled in the language. Moreover, there are also non-published manuscripts he authored and are now kept in the UST Archives. These could help us learn more about the mind of this great man who once served, taught, and published his works in the University. Translating and publishing them in the future could also help in furthering our effort of appreciating and nurturing the tradition of Thomism in our University.

It is also important to reiterate here once again that the University's brand of Thomism in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century is one that is fundamentally open to discourse with other disciplines and traditions. At the beginning of this paper, I made reference to Father Villarreal's statement about the method of the Dominican Fr. Zeferino González who argued for the need to study other emerging philosophical schools, including those that opposed the teachings of the Church; this is to better respond to the issues being raised by other schools of thought.<sup>93</sup> Throughout this paper, I endeavored to show that Father de Blas was reliably open to dialogue with various psychologists, both the modern and the contemporary thinkers in this field, even if more than once he had to refute them by asserting the primacy of Thomas Aquinas' philosophy.**PS**

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<sup>93</sup> See footnote number 1 above.

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