



The Reception and Systematization of Augustinian Thought in Thomas Aquinas's Reflection on the Teacher and the Act of Teaching

Recepción y ordenación del pensamiento agustiniano en la reflexión de Tomás de
Aquino sobre el maestro y la acción de enseñar

PhD. Luis Mariano Bártoli¹

lbartoli@uao.es

Universitat Abat Oliba CEU – CEU Universities
Barcelona, Spain

Abstract

The thought concerning the action of teaching by the human teacher in Thomas Aquinas and Augustine of Hippo has been extensively studied. However, when compared, both thinkers are often presented as offering two distinct ways of understanding this action. On the one hand, the Augustinian approach—strongly influenced by Platonism—denies the causality of the human teacher and grounds all teaching activity in the illumination of the Inner Teacher. On the other hand, the Thomistic approach—clearly influenced by Aristotelianism—while not denying the role of inner illumination, attributes to the human teacher an external efficient causality in the generation of knowledge in the student. As a result, the two are frequently contrasted or regarded as fundamentally different ways of exercising the teaching office. This paper seeks to examine how, despite their differences, Thomas Aquinas appropriated and integrated significant aspects of Augustinian thought in shaping his own vision of the teacher. This vision, while original, is deeply rooted in the Christian tradition and is especially evident in his work *De Veritate*, particularly in the section known as *De Magistro*, though it is presented with greater clarity in the *Summa Theologiae*, due to the order in which the question is addressed there. Thus, this study aims to determine whether Aquinas's reception of Augustinian thought is merely

¹ PhD Philosophy from the Universitat Abat Oliba CEU. Director of Studies. Degree in Philosophy at the Universitat Abat Oliba CEU. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0324-5532>.



incidental or whether it involves a deeper assimilation that enables him to present a fuller and more authentic understanding of the figure of the teacher—one that would not be possible without the Augustinian contribution.

Keywords: Thomas Aquinas, Augustine of Hippo, Teacher, Teaching, Illumination, Interiority.

Resumen

El pensamiento sobre la acción de enseñar por parte del maestro humano en Tomás de Aquino y San Agustín de Hipona ha sido extensamente estudiado, pero cuando se les compara, ambos pensadores suelen ser presentados como dos modos diversos de entender dicha acción. Por una parte, el modo agustiniano, con marcada influencia platónica, niega la causalidad del maestro humano y funda toda la acción docente en la iluminación del Maestro Interior; mientras que el modo tomista de enseñar, de clara influencia aristotélica, sin negar la acción interior, atribuye al maestro humano una causalidad eficiente exterior en la generación de la ciencia en el discípulo. Siendo así, ha resultado que frecuentemente se les contraponen o se los ve como dos modos distintos de ejercer el magisterio. En el presente artículo se busca estudiar cómo, pese a sus diferencias, Tomás de Aquino ha asumido y recibido gran parte del pensamiento agustiniano para configurar su propia visión del maestro. Dicha visión, que no deja de ser original pero arraigada en la tradición cristiana, se aprecia, desde luego muy especialmente en su obra *De Veritate*, conocida como *De Magistro*, pero con más claridad en la *Suma de Teología*, debido al orden en el que trata allí la cuestión. De este modo, se intentará descubrir si la recepción que hace Tomás de Aquino es meramente accidental o acaso hay una asimilación del pensamiento de san Agustín que le permite mostrar una dimensión del maestro más verdadera que no sería posible advertir sin el aporte agustiniano.

Palabras clave: Tomás de Aquino, Agustín de Hipona, Maestro, Enseñanza, Iluminación, Interioridad.

Date of Receipt: 13/03/2025 – Date of Acceptance: 09/05/2025



Introduction

The study and reflection on the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas's teacher usually begins with q.11 of his work *De Veritate*, in which Aquinas asks whether man is capable of teaching—that is, of causing knowledge in man—or whether this is possible only for God, who is the only true teacher. There is clearly stated—through discussion with Augustine, but also with Plato and Averroes—that man is indeed a true teacher, capable of causing knowledge in his disciple as a coadjutant and secondary cause, but always as an external agent, since, in fact, God is the one who teaches as the inner Teacher. The entire development of the doctrine is, to a large extent, made in response to Augustine's doctrine of the teacher, which is founded on the Gospel to affirm that “*unus est Magister vester, Christus*” (“One is your Teacher, Christ”). Thomas Aquinas, of course, preserves the position of his own intellectual master by maintaining that Augustine's assertion that Christ is the inner teacher of man in no way implies the denial of the causality of the human teacher.² Nevertheless, in several passages Augustine maintains that the human teacher does not teach (*docet*), but only admonishes or points out (*admonet*)³. Furthermore, Aquinas cites Aristotle in developing his response and does not appear to base it on the thought of the Bishop of Hippo. On the other hand, the differences between the two regarding the human teacher are well known and evident⁴.

The above might suggest that, in his doctrine of the teacher, the Angelic Doctor distances himself from Augustinian ideas, or that his reflection on the teacher is even constructed in opposition to Augustine's ideas. Primarily because their epistemologies are so distinct, as López explains, and given that these epistemologies underpin the act of teaching, it is reasonable to consider that their perspectives may be divergent and even antagonistic⁵. For this reason, in the present paper, we will attempt to study and highlight the reception of Augustine's doctrine in the thought of Thomas Aquinas, to dispel any doubt about the beneficial influence Augustine exerted on Aquinas, along with positively

² *Cfr.* Thomas Aquinas. *De Veritate*, q. 11, a. 1, in c.

³ Augustine of Hippo, 1948.

⁴ *Cfr.* Pérez-Estévez, 1996.

⁵ *Cfr.* López, 2020, pp. 864.



showing that in the synthesis of Thomistic thought on the activity of the teacher, not only is the Greek tradition found, especially the thought of Aristotle, but there is also a rich influence of the thought of the Bishop of Hippo. To this end, we will divide our exposition into two sections. First, we will study the synthesis of Augustine's thought on the teacher, which will allow us to properly understand the metaphysical and epistemological foundations of his vision; and second, we will address the perspective of Thomas Aquinas's teacher, not to present it exhaustively, but simply to identify how Augustine's thought is received in Aquinas.

Christian Thought and Augustine's *De Magistro*

1.1. The truth lies within man

To address the fundamental aspects of Augustine's thought on the act of teaching, it is necessary to understand his doctrine concerning how man comes to know truth—or, in more properly Augustinian terms, to ask how the finite and mutable human mind attains certain knowledge of eternal truths, which govern and rule the mind and therefore transcend it. Once this question is resolved, it is possible to subsequently address the act of causing knowledge in the disciple.

The first thing that becomes clear is the markedly interior character of such knowledge, which makes it possible to pose the question of teaching in the same terms of interiority. Truth is found within man, in the intimacy of the human soul, and therefore it is there that one must seek it.

Do not go out, return to yourself. Truth dwells in man's interior. And if you find that your nature is mutable, transcend to yourself. But remember that when you transcend yourself, you transcend the reasoning soul. Proceed, therefore, to where the very light of reason is kindled. For to what does every good reasoner aspire, if not to the truth? Yet truth is not attained by reasoning—it is itself the end toward which all reasoning tends. Beyond this there is no greater delight. So consent to it, acknowledging that you are not what it is. It is not attained by seeking in space,



but by a disposition of mind—so that the inner man may agree with the indwelling truth in a delight that is not low or carnal but supremely spiritual⁶.

The starting point for the search for truth is not found in external reality or sensory knowledge, but rather in the intimacy of the mind, in the experience that a person has of their own inner life. Truth is an inner guest—something present in the deepest part of the human soul⁷. However, this interiorization does not lead a person to close in on themselves in a selfish way. On the contrary, interiorization is the beginning of an ascending process that takes a person beyond themselves, ultimately reaching God, who is the very light of all reasoning and the source of all truth.

The degrees of knowledge correspond to degrees of spiritual elevation. As Sciacca points out, this is the conquest of ever-deeper interiority: to interiorize to transcend oneself. To seek, to philosophise, is to grasp truth within, that is, to acquire knowledge of the soul and of God⁸.

A person must be able to find, by returning to the intimate root of their being, not only the conviction of their own personal character but also the awareness of their radical openness to God, who fulfils their restless soul. For Augustine, the whole question of the search for truth and its possession is the convergence of all human energies toward the one object that attracts, guides, enlivens, and unifies.

1.2. *Doctrine of Illumination*

⁶ Augustine of Hippo. *Of True Religion*, 39, 72. Commenting on this text Sciacca says: “The process of interiorization of the soul—which coincides with its gradual ascent and self-conquest as a soul, and therefore its gradual perfection—is simultaneously a process of transcendence. As the soul ascends within itself, stage by stage, it increasingly reaches itself, until in its innermost depth—at the point of utmost recollection and absolute concentration—it seizes the principle of its existence, God, that is, the principle that brings it into being and transcends it, and which, obscurely, has been present in it from the beginning. One has transcended oneself yet has not become alien to oneself; absolute transcendence is reached at the point of maximal interiority” (Sciacca, 1955, p. 152).

⁷ A reflection on this topic is conveyed in the following article, which presents the act of teaching as a human form of illumination, like the communication of a verb carried within: *Cfr.* Amado & Letelier, 2023.

⁸ Sciacca, 1955, p. 151.



This knowledge of truth is possible within the person not because of an illumination performed by the agent intellect upon images, enabling the act of understanding as in Aristotle; nor because the soul has contemplated universal ideas in a previous life, as in Plato. Rather, it is possible due to an illumination of God in the soul.

As Castelló notes, what is commonly called the “Augustinian theory of illumination” is the doctrine that “the human mind can only access eternal and immutable truths through a certain influx of—or more precisely, ‘in’—a light emanating from the divine intellect”⁹, rather than a series of scattered passages in Augustine’s works. The idea of knowledge as illumination, present in Greek philosophy, appears in Augustine in a more explicit and evident way. The concept of illumination comes to Augustine from Platonic philosophy¹⁰, but not exclusively; it is also influenced by Plotinus¹¹ and by Sacred Scripture.

The human soul is a substance of spiritual nature, which does not preexist the body in a previous world but was created by God. As Augustine states in *De Trinitate*:

When united with intelligible realities, the mind perceives them through a peculiar incorporeal light, just as the bodily eye perceives all that surrounds it by means of corporeal light—having been created capable of perceiving that light and ordered toward it¹².

This knowledge of the intelligible does not originate in the sensible, nor do the senses take the initiative; rather, it begins in the higher part of the soul that illuminates, allowing man to know¹³. This higher part of the soul, close to God, pours its own activity over the

⁹ Castelló, 2022, p. 51.

¹⁰ Cfr. Plato. *Republic*, VII, 517b - 534b.

¹¹ He held, among other things, that the same relationship exists between God and the soul as between the sun and the moon; that is, the moon illuminates only by virtue of the light that comes to it from the sun. Likewise, the soul cannot know by illuminating things unless it is itself illuminated by God. (Cfr. Plotinus, 2018, L. V, Ennead Six, Chapter 4).

¹² Augustine of Hippo. *De Trinitate*, XII, 15, 24.

¹³ In the interior of the soul, Saint Augustine distinguishes between an inferior reason, which is in contact with the body and whose object is the knowledge of the mutable, sensible things; and a superior reason, which is in contact with God, is a neighbor of God, and whose end is the search for wisdom, the knowledge of the intelligible, of ideas and God.



senses and makes it possible to know the truth. Although Augustine recognizes in sensation a form of knowledge involving the body, through the affection of external objects upon it, thereby giving testimony to the existence of the world, it is nevertheless the soul that feels through the body; it is the soul that holds primacy in this act, which, insofar as it deals with what is mutable and imperfect, is not knowledge in the full sense. Sensation is not knowledge of the truth, but opinion in which the true is mixed with the false. True knowledge exists only when the rational soul contemplates eternal and immutable truths.

In this way, it is the soul itself that, starting from sensible knowledge, reacts from its own interior—not by recalling what was contemplated in a previous life as Plato taught, which is incompatible with his Christian anthropology—but by judging within its interior, with immutable and perfect judgments, of which man is capable, as demonstrated by mathematical judgments, among others. Reason has absolutely true principles according to which it judges.

Now, the human soul, recognising itself as spiritual and therefore superior to the corporeal objects it judges¹⁴, knows that it has not invented or regulated the very principle that serves it to recognise the form and movements of bodies. It is evident that these judgments cannot come from external things, since external things are not immutable, necessary, or eternal. The principle by which one judges cannot be beneath reason itself, nor can reason create it. If it is capable of immutable and perfect judgments, it is because there exists an Immutable and Perfect Understanding. Otherwise, relying only on the mutability and imperfection of corporeal things, human knowledge would not be possible:

The veracity of judgments of reason is guaranteed by the truths intuited by understanding, but never created by understanding itself. They are the light of the mind, given to it by God. Therefore, God is the absolute and transcendent foundation of the truth of human truths¹⁵.

¹⁴ *Cfr.* Augustine of Hippo. *De libero arbitrio*, II, 5, 12.

¹⁵ Sciacca, 1955, p. 220.



It is said that this Immutable Understanding, God Himself, is the one who illuminates the soul so that it can make judgments about reality and thus know the truth. Ideas do not originate outside of man but are illuminated to the soul by God, as far as He makes it partake of His own light. According to Augustine, it is *God who enlightens in our spirit the universal ideas*, giving us a kind of superior, divine vision of all that surrounds us and is offered to the senses. Without God, we would walk blindly.

We cannot perceive the immutable truth of things, he explains in the *Soliloquies*, unless those things are illuminated as if by a sun¹⁶. That light of God, which illuminates the mind, is what makes all things known by the human intellect luminous. The human intelligible is a reflection of the Intelligible that is identified with the divine Intelligence. Man is not Truth and certainly does not possess it in its full reality, but the reflection of Truth, as Sciacca says, “it is the light with which God illuminates the human intellect and makes reason capable of true judgments”¹⁷. In summary, God Himself radiates truth upon the spirit of each individual¹⁸:

God, who is pure Being, communicates His being to other things through creation. In the same way, He—as Truth—grants to minds the capacity to know the truth by producing a metaphysical imprint of truth itself within them. God, as Being, creates; as Truth, He enlightens us; and as Love, He draws us to Himself and gives us peace¹⁹.

It is not the illumination itself that the mind sees, nor does it see the very essence of God; rather, through that illumination, it perceives the characteristics of eternity and necessity in eternal and necessary truths. The light, which has its foundation in God and in which the soul participates, is what grants the mind the capacity to see the characteristics of universality and immutability in things and thus to judge truthfully.

¹⁶ Cfr. Augustine of Hippo. *Soliloquies*, I, 16.

¹⁷ Sciacca, 1955, p. 234.

¹⁸ Cfr. Augustine of Hippo. *Soliloquies*, I, 8 - 15.

¹⁹ Reale & Antiseri, 1992, p. 386.



God is the very Light that illuminates souls. God illuminates souls; they receive the light just as the moon and other things receive it from the sun. Therefore, God is Intelligence and gives intelligence, communicating it through His Light. He is Truth itself; in contrast, the truths of the soul are such because of the light they receive from God. Similarly, the intellection accessible to the soul is nothing other than light received from God. Certainly, our reason is light because it is light whenever it makes something known, but it is a light that is not from itself. Only God is light by Himself.

It might seem, then, that if God is the One from whom we receive knowledge, wisdom, and truth, the soul itself does nothing in the act of knowing and acquiring science. It would be a mere passive subject. However, this is not what Augustine teaches. God created the human soul with its rational faculty, capable of performing its acts by itself. Nevertheless, according to what it is, it cannot reflect, compare, discern, or unify unless it “sees” the eternal rules of judgment, intuited by the intellect and given to it as light by God. It is illumination that provides the mind with the intelligence of truth—that is, the intuition of the primary truths that reason uses to judge.

Within the light of intelligence, reason sees the ideas, but not as if they were concretely and individually present there; rather, it sees the norms or rules that are an image of the Ideas in God, according to which it judges and generates the word in which it knows the truth. God assists reason so that it may reach the truth. Whenever reason is outside the light, it is outside the truth: the soul is outside itself because the light never ceases to shine within it²⁰.

This divine illumination, however, is not a supernatural illumination, but all men are illuminated²¹. Unlike Plato, who held that the soul had contemplated the ideas in the

²⁰ *Cfr.* Sciacca, 1955, p. 258.

²¹ Sciacca says: “If our thought is illuminated, this means that another light is kindled. Thought is my light, but I am not the origin of my light. All beings endowed with intelligence each possess their own light, and certainly it is not I who illuminates them, nor do they illuminate me. We are all illuminated by a light that is none of us. The lights of men are kindled and weakened, shining one moment and seeming to fade the next; my light, like that of my fellow men, is therefore not the Light. Hence, my intelligence and my reason—every individual intelligence and every created reason—are testimonies to the existence of the Absolute Light. I cannot deny that I exist as a rational being; therefore, the universal Light, God the Illuminator, in whom my light—and every light—is kindled, exists. Moreover, although I know my light and all created lights, I do not naturally know the Light that illuminates universally: my intelligence is

world of ideas, for Augustine, it is God Himself who illuminates spirits, allowing them to know what things are²².

Now, God does not illuminate as if from outside, but from the innermost part of man. Augustine acknowledges this when he says in his *Confessions*: “You were within me, more inward than my most inward part and higher than my highest part”²³. Indeed, “God must be sought in the innermost part of the rational soul, which is what is called the ‘inner man’”²⁴. God is present as light in the innermost part of man and from there illuminates the ideas in his mind, which is why it is there that science is learned.

1.3. *Memory of Self*

The ultimate foundation of all knowledge, and therefore of the acquisition of science itself, Augustine places in a presence that the soul has of itself, by which it knows itself even before making any other knowledge, including that of its own nature²⁵. Thus, he distinguishes between knowing and thinking about oneself, giving as an example that even when the grammarian is not thinking about grammar because he is thinking about medicine, it is not said that he ignores grammar. Grammar is present in the soul as a permanent habit:

Thus, not knowing something and not thinking about it are two different things (we would not say that a scholar versed in many disciplines is ignorant of grammar simply because, his mind being occupied with medicine, he does not think about it). Being, I repeat, one thing to be ignorant of oneself and another to not think

conscious of being illuminated, but it does not know the light that illuminates it, except insofar as it is lifted by a special illumination from that same creative Light” (Sciacca, 1955, p. 235).

²² Copleston, 2000, p. 69.

²³ Augustine of Hippo. *Confessions*, III, 6, 11.

²⁴ Augustine of Hippo. *De Magistro*, 2. This work was written in Tagaste in 389. It is conceived as a dialogue with his son, Adeodatus, who was 16 years old at the time and died shortly afterwards. After his return to Rome and determined to embark on a life of retirement, Augustine did not forget to continue his son's literary instruction. This dialogue raises the themes of the value of language and its capacity to generate knowledge in the student. The topics discussed are merely a prelude to moral and religious teaching, which is where the rhetorician Augustine primarily wishes to lead his son, but it is necessary to dwell on these preliminary themes.

²⁵ For a more thorough understanding of the relationship in Saint Augustine's thought between knowing and knowing oneself: Calabrese, 2020.



about oneself, such is the vivacity of love that it draws toward itself realities long pondered with love, if it is attached to them by the bond of care, and it carries them with it when it turns inward to—so to speak—think about itself²⁶.

In the same way, since not knowing oneself and not thinking about oneself are not the same, the human soul, even when it does not consider what it is, or when it is not considering what things are—that is, when it is not thinking—cannot, for that reason, cease to know itself. If it were to cease knowing itself, it would somehow lose itself. For this reason, Augustine affirms:

I cannot understand how the soul, when it is not thinking of itself, is not present to itself—since it can never be without itself—as if it were one thing and its own gaze upon itself another²⁷.

Indeed, for the soul to be present to itself is nothing other than the soul knowing itself in its entirety. Possessing an immaterial, spiritual nature, the soul—unlike the eye—does not need to see itself in a mirror, but rather “in thinking of itself, it becomes present to itself”²⁸. However, when it is not thinking, Augustine says, “certainly it is not before its own gaze, nor does it shape its own view of itself; yet it knows itself as though it were its own memory (*memoria sui*)”²⁹.

The soul possesses a memory of itself, a *memoria sui*, a knowledge of itself that is before the knowledge of reality and makes it possible. This memory allows the soul always to recall itself as the same, identical over time, so that even if it stops thinking about itself, it remains retained for itself because it never ceases to be before its own presence. The very precept “know thyself” would be impossible to fulfil if one did not know the “self.”

²⁶ Augustine of Hippo. *De Trinitate*, X, 5, 7.

²⁷ Augustine of Hippo. *De Trinitate*, X, 6, 8.

²⁸ Augustine of Hippo. *De Trinitate*, X, 9, 11.

²⁹ Augustine of Hippo. *De Trinitate*, X, 6, 8.



When the mind is told “know yourself”, — Augustine explains — by the very knowledge by which it understands what is said in “know yourself,” it already knows itself; and not by anything else, but because it is present to itself. In other words, if it did not know itself before the command, it could in no way fulfil it, because it would have no way to recognise itself upon encountering itself without that prior knowledge.³⁰ For this reason, after illustrating this knowledge with an example, he holds that within the folds of the soul:

certain items of knowledge about some things, as it were, come to the surface and are more clearly presented to the gaze of the soul when they are thought about. That is when the soul realizes that it was remembering, understanding, and loving them³¹.

This recollection that the soul has of itself is not the action of a particular faculty of the soul, whether sensitive or intellectual, but rather it is the very presence of the soul to itself, which is that presence, that knowledge from which science can be generated.

The soul recognises itself, without which recognition it could not generate intelligence, which is nothing other than that which allows the soul to understand all that it thinks. Thus, without that memory of itself, man would not understand and would not be able to communicate what he has conceived to another through the ministry of the external voice. This clearly establishes the distinction between that memory of self, which leads the soul to remember itself and to have a habitual presence of itself, and the interior intelligence by which the nature of things is known.

Therefore, *memoria sui* does not consist in knowledge of the past as past, but in habitual self-awareness before the intellection of species, which Augustine calls *notitia* (knowledge). He adds that it is also distinct from the interior will by which one loves, so that *notitia* and love are present as habits in the memory of self. This memory, habitual

³⁰ Augustine of Hippo. *De Trinitate*, X, 11, 17.

³¹ Augustine of Hippo. *De Trinitate*, XIV, 7, 9.

knowledge of self, is nothing other than the light connatural to the soul itself, which is participation in the divine illumination discussed in the previous section.

1.4. *The Inner Word and Speech*

In that memory of self, the soul knows the truth in some way; however, this does not imply that the soul preexists the body or that Augustine adheres to Platonic anthropology. For the Doctor of Hippo, knowing is not remembering, but knowledge of things is obtained by seeing. “We can know only what we see”³², he says in *De Magistro*. Thus, man does not learn by the words he hears but through a vision—a vision of the Truth that is God, which, by illuminating the soul, allows it to conceive a true knowledge of reality³³. As Pérez-Esteve points out:

The inner process of intelligible knowledge, for Saint Augustine, is similar and analogous to the process of sensible knowledge. Just as with the eyes we discover and know things illuminated by the light of the sun, so with understanding and reason we discover and know things illuminated by an interior intelligible light³⁴.

The soul, thanks to the illumination of God, sees the eternal reasons and conceives an inner word:

With the gaze of the soul, we see in this eternal Truth—by which all temporal things have been created—a form that is the model of our being and of all that we perform either within ourselves or in bodies when acting according to true and right reason. Through it, we conceive a true knowledge of things, which is like a word begotten within us when we speak, and which, when born, does not depart from us³⁵.

³² Augustine of Hippo. *De Magistro*, 11, 37.

³³ It should not be forgotten that in Saint Augustine, prior to the conception of the interior verb or *verbum cordis*, an unformed word is shaped, which serves as a condition for the subsequent interior verb and which, in turn, is unformed; namely, the *verbum cordis formabile*. To explore this further, *Cfr*: Pierantoni, 2011.

³⁴ Pérez-Estévez, 1996, p. 105.

³⁵ Augustine of Hippo. *De Trinitate*, IX, 7, 12.



It is by the gaze upon the eternal Truth that the soul generates an inner word, not by looking outside itself at that Truth, but by participating in its light. Without that word, knowledge is neither attained nor possessed. Augustine says:

It is therefore necessary, when we speak the truth—that is, when we say what we know—that our word be born from the knowledge stored in our memory and be absolutely identical to the nature of the knowledge from which it is born³⁶.

The knowledge that man can acquire is that which allows him to know everything he knows, and this is necessarily true because there is no knowledge of error. In such a way that when we speak, we do so about those things that are known when we think—things that are known to us even when we are not actively thinking about them, as we have noted above. And we know in a word that is not divine but human, which is neither sound nor necessarily part of any language, but which is, before all signs that represent it and is generated by the knowledge residing in the soul.

But is this knowledge of the immutable and universal a knowledge of a science expressed by an equally eternal word? Augustine responds that:

But the things which are known in such a way that they can never be forgotten—because they are always present and belong to the very nature of the soul, like the knowledge that we live (as long as the soul remains, this knowledge remains; and since the soul remains always, this knowledge remains always)—these, and other similar realities, even though they are always known, we do not always think about them. Thus it is difficult to determine in what sense the word (*verbum*) that arises from this knowledge is called ‘eternal’, given that thought is the forge of our word³⁷.

According to Augustine, thought is what forges the human word. This word is not eternal nor possessed from eternity. What is eternal to the soul, in a certain way, is life itself, just

³⁶ Augustine of Hippo. *De Trinitate*, XV, 10, 17.

³⁷ Augustine of Hippo. *De Trinitate*, XV, 15, 25.



as the knowledge of its life is eternal, but thinking about its life or thinking about the knowledge of its life is not eternal, because when it thinks about some things, focusing its attention on them, it ceases to think about others. From this it follows that, if an eternal science is possible in the soul, the thought of that science is not eternal; and if our intimate and true word can only be expressed by our thought, it follows that only God has a sempiternal Word coeternal with Him³⁸.

1.5. Communication of Science and Teaching by the Human Teacher

Now, if we consider the communication of that science and truth known and possessed by the soul, it can only be realised if we think, “for even if no words sound outwardly, whoever thinks is always speaking in his heart”³⁹. But, Augustine adds, not because we call thoughts “words of the heart” is it excluded that they are visions generated by the vision of knowledge when they are true. Visions generated, a generated word, but by the vision of knowledge. This is not about innate ideas, but participation in the divine light that makes possible the knowing of human truth and its communication⁴⁰.

Indeed, this intimate knowledge is what allows communication between men. It is evident that men communicate and understand each other in conversation, but the question that must be asked after examining Augustine’s thought on human knowledge is whether there is true communication of ideas through words. Because ideas, in some way, exist in the interiority of man, of all men, it does not seem possible that they can be communicated from one to another. Therefore, are ideas always contained in words in such a way that what is communicated is the idea itself and not the mere word?

³⁸ Cfr. Augustine of Hippo. *De Trinitate* XV, 15, 25.

³⁹ Augustine of Hippo. *De Trinitate*, XV, 10, 17.

⁴⁰ Cfr. Augustine of Hippo. *De Trinitate*, XV, 10, 18. In this sense, we disagree with Osuna's statement in the introduction to the question *De Magistro*, when he maintains that the ideas are in the soul, but the soul is not yet aware of them. Cf. Osuna. Sciacca, for his part, maintains that one can speak of an *Augustinian reminiscence* distinct from the Platonic one. This Augustinian reminiscence rejects the idea of remembering knowledge acquired in the past, as well as the preexistence of the soul, which is its foundation. But he accepts that reason discovers intelligible truths in the mind (Cfr. Sciacca, 1955, p. 252). For his part, Gilson states: “If Augustine still uses the words ‘memory’ and ‘reminiscence’ to explain his thought, they must be understood in a sense very different from that employed by Plato: Platonic memory of the past here gives way to that Augustinian memory of the present, whose role will continue to assert itself ever more strongly” (Gilson, 2022, p. 155).



This question about the communication of ideas leads directly to the question that concerns the development of our topic: Is it possible for the teacher to communicate science to the disciple and, therefore, to teach him? This is the problem Augustine poses in the dialogue *De Magistro*, the principal source of the doctrine on the teacher of Saint Thomas Aquinas, and, for that reason, it demands careful analysis.

To transmit ideas, man naturally has language, words, which are signs of the very ideas. Augustine's question is whether words truly reflect what things are, since, for example, it is a fact that confusion or misunderstanding exists even in ordinary conversation, given the diverse meanings attributed to words.

Thus, words do not appear very dependable to Augustine. Words, he tells us, "Teach only those who are taught by the truth itself"⁴¹. That is, words alone are not enough. So much so that interlocutors may use the same words but at the same time use different meanings; words may even be used to say something other than what one genuinely thinks.

Thus, what seems to be a dialogue can be a monologue. One believes they are communicating ideas, but instead, words are communicated: the words I pronounce do not communicate my ideas to the listener but evoke theirs with their own resonances, accompanied by feelings that only they can experience—very personal and incommunicable; likewise, the words I hear do not give me the ideas of the other, but evoke mine. It could be said that each one receives what they already possess and learns what they already know.

If only words and not ideas are communicated, then teaching becomes impossible. One cannot communicate one's own science to another. Language or words only teach if they communicate ideas, that is, science. Augustine says: "When a sign is given to me

⁴¹ Augustine of Hippo. *De Magistro*, XI, 38.



and I do not know the thing signified, it teaches me nothing; and if I know the thing, what does the sign teach me?”⁴².

Is then the way to communicate such science to lead the disciple to direct experience: to present things themselves instead of words? It does not seem so, since knowledge of external things is knowledge of the particular, and Augustine knows well that knowledge of truth and science is of the universal and necessary. Moreover, one does not always have all that is necessary to know. Is teaching then impossible?

To answer, Augustine places himself in a different order from the very assumption that teaching comes from outside, as if one man communicated his ideas to another. The Bishop of Hippo aligns with Plato and Socrates and resolves the question from interiority. Words do not come from outside; learning comes from within. The question is misunderstood if the teacher is thought to give his students a definition of the idea, which, once understood by the students, somehow enters their minds as an idea they did not previously possess.

Indeed, in Augustine's thought, ideas do not enter from outside, because just as no one can live or die in my place, no one can think in my place. This, of course, does not mean that students learn nothing, but simply that learning does not mean receiving ideas from outside as if the mind were a container to be filled with something external⁴³. In this sense, the teacher indeed teaches nothing.

If you see that what I have said is true, when questioned about each judgment, you would have said that you knew it; so now you know from whom you have learned this, and certainly not from me, for if I ask you, you would answer everything. If, on the other hand, you do not recognize that it is true, then neither He nor I have taught you; I, because I can never teach; He, because you cannot yet learn⁴⁴.

⁴² Augustine of Hippo. *De Magistro*, VIII, 28.

⁴³ *Cfr.*, Granados & Granados, 2009.

⁴⁴ Augustine of Hippo. *De Magistro*, XIV, n.46.



“I can never teach,” Augustine tells his son. What he means by this is nothing other than that there certainly exists true teaching and a true teacher, but that this true teacher is not man. He states more clearly in his *Retractations*: “At about that time I wrote a book entitled *On the Teacher*, in which it is discussed and concluded that there is no teacher who imparts knowledge to man except God, as is also written in the Gospel: ‘One is your Teacher, even Christ’”⁴⁵. Christ is the true teacher. The human teacher does not teach (*docet*), but only warns, admonishes, or points out (*admonet*). Regarding all things we understand, Augustine says, “it is not the speaker’s voice that sounds outside, but the truth that presides within the mind itself, which we consult, perhaps because we have been prompted by the words to do so”⁴⁶. Gilson, in his work *Introduction to the Study of Saint Augustine*, commenting on the thought of the Bishop of Hippo, holds that for words to have meaning for the minds of those to whom they are directed, it is necessary that this meaning already be present in their thought, and precisely this meaning, with which their own mind invests the words heard, is what makes those words intelligible to them⁴⁷.

Just as Plato and Socrates taught, and in some way Aristotle with the first principles of science, Augustine also understands that science dwells in the interior of the soul in some manner and that it is from there that various realities become intelligible, so that the soul itself has primacy in the learning process.

Augustine presents it as follows: There are three possible situations in the teaching relationship of truth between teacher and disciple. First, that the disciple does not know that the teacher is teaching him the truth; second, that the disciple knows that his teacher is teaching him error; and finally, that the disciple knows that the teacher is teaching him the truth. In none of these three cases does the disciple learn. Because if he does not know that he is being taught the truth, or if he knows that he is being taught error, no knowledge is acquired. But in the third case, he also does not learn, because he already knows the truth. The one who knows that the teacher teaches the truth—the act of knowing this is the disciple’s, it is his own truth, not learned from the teacher, before what the teacher

⁴⁵ Augustine of Hippo, *Retractations*. Chapter 2.

⁴⁶ Augustine of Hippo, *De Magistro*, XI, n. 38.

⁴⁷ Gilson, 2022.



has said. Therefore, in reality, what the disciple desires is not to listen to the teacher, but to listen to that which is true in what the teacher has to say, and this is only possible if, in some way, the truth is already known. The disciple, Augustine says:

considers within himself whether the teacher has spoken true things, examining, according to his capacity, the inner truth that is within him. It is then that he learns. And when he has recognized inwardly the truth of what was taught, he usually praises his teacher, unaware that he is praising a learner, not a teacher⁴⁸.

Teaching, therefore, despite the truth being within man, is by no means unnecessary or useless. It should not be understood, as Castelló points out, “as an exhortation not to study with anyone, as if there were no possibility of expecting help or any benefit from external instruction”⁴⁹. However, teaching is not understood as the communication of an idea from the teacher to the disciple. Learning, for its part, is not receiving ideas from the outside that another possesses. Thought is interior to itself. It does not pass from one spirit to another: teaching is not through ideas, but by stimulating the discovery of the truth that every spirit carries within itself. The disciple, moved by the teacher’s words, turns inward to seek the truth he possesses. In this sense, we agree with Sciacca, who holds that in Augustine’s teaching is “an invitation to the truth, it is a stimulus to seek within, a warning to find the truth”⁵⁰.

To teach a truth is simply to make something possessed be discovered by the listener. But both the act of discovering and the act of knowing the truth are interior and our own. For this reason, Augustine maintains that learning is not a passive act but an active one; teaching is not imprinting from outside but eliciting from within; it does not foster a passive attitude but stimulates an activity. The disciple who listens is not passive but judges what is said to him, and the judgment is his own and, moreover, the judgment is an act of understanding, which is not always easy but often arduous.

⁴⁸ Augustine of Hippo. *De Magistro*; c.14, n.45.

⁴⁹ Castelló, 2022, p. 52.

⁵⁰ Sciacca, 1955, p. 250.



Certainly, the teacher's words must be meaningful—that is, they must contain within them the human word—since without this, communication would not be possible.

And when we address others with speech, we add to our inner word the ministry of voice or some other sensible sign, in order to bring about in the mind of the hearer—through a material recollection—something very similar to what remains in the speaker's own mind. Thus, in everything we do with the members of our body, whether in speech or in action, in approving or reproving moral conduct, nothing is done without the prior presence of the inner word. No one, intending to act, does so without first speaking in his heart⁵¹.

Even though words contain the word (*verbum*) as their content, the ideas of the teacher never leave him. They travel by means of the external voice, but without departing from the teacher or being communicated to the disciple. However, the teacher's voice allows the production in the soul of the same knowledge that is in him—not because he communicates it (*docet*), as we have noted, but because the disciple himself finds it within himself. Therefore, there is no separate truth of the teacher and truth of the disciple, but only one truth, of which all teachers and all disciples are students. This Teacher, of whom we are all students, is the Word of God.

1.6 Christ, the Only Teacher

There is only one Truth, one inner Teacher, in whom we all communicate, understand one another, agree, and love one another—that Teacher is Christ. Hence, when we understand, when we find the truth, in some way we have communication with the Word. Learning is a continual questioning of ourselves; it is a true dialogue between the soul and the truth, because there resides the Truth, which is Christ Himself. As Vilarroig *et al.*, point out, “the force that drives him to seek knowledge is both authority and reason.

⁵¹ Augustine of Hippo. *De Trinitate*, IX, 7, 12.



For Augustine, the most solid authority is Christ. Therefore, he asserts that we have a guide capable of leading us to the very depths of truth”⁵².

For Augustine, as we have noted, knowing is not remembering. The truth is in the soul, and, in this, he agrees with Plato, but it is there because within us is its original intuition—the presence of the inner Teacher who dictates within; ultimately, it is the presence of God who illuminates. It is not a recollection of the past but the luminous presence of God, who from within teaches the soul:

We understand the multitude of things that enter our intellect, not by consulting the external voice that speaks to us, but by consulting inwardly the truth that reigns in the mind; words may perhaps move us to inquire. And this truth that is consulted and teaches, and is said to dwell in the inner man, is Christ⁵³.

The external voice is that of the human teacher who only moves us to inquire, who only arouses a search, but who does not teach. The true teacher is Christ. There is no other Teacher besides Him:

Men are mistaken in calling teachers those who are not truly such [...] for, being prompted by the word of the so-called teacher, they soon learn inwardly, and believe they have been taught by the external word⁵⁴.

In such a way that external words teach nothing. Only Christ, the inner Word, is capable of communicating truth to man. Because the true doctor and teacher is Christ. Osuna explains this by saying, “The known thing is superior to the signs and words that serve us in coming to know it”⁵⁵. And the truth known and taught is, ultimately, Christ, who dwells in our soul. It is to this truth that the disciple turns when he knows the truth, and it is this truth that the teacher has attempted to teach, not his own thoughts⁵⁶.

⁵² Vilarroig *et al.*, 2023, p. 41.

⁵³ Augustine of Hippo. *De Magistro*, n. 38.

⁵⁴ Augustine of Hippo. *De Magistro*, n. 45.

⁵⁵ Osuna, 2001, p. 286

⁵⁶ Osuna, 2001, p. 287.



Man as a teacher can be a witness and guide in the process of knowing the truth, but in no way can he teach the truth inwardly; God is the one who teaches. However, it is not enough for the Teacher to teach, because He is always doing so. It is also necessary, for the soul to truly know, that the disciple's soul pays attention to the truth—that is, that it is not in any way attracted or distracted by some other reality. The learner needs to listen carefully to be able to make the necessary introspection that enables him to find what is contained within himself. In *De Magistro*, Augustine says:

If, when the voice of the human teacher sounds outwardly, the Divine Teacher does not speak within our soul, we learn nothing, for only the Divine Teacher persuades and convinces us; hence we believe Him, and because we believe Him, He convinces us⁵⁷.

For Augustine, as Sciacca comments, God is the Father of intelligible Light, who is Wisdom or the Son and the light of our mind⁵⁸. Therefore, the Word is Light, the truth that illuminates souls. Christ illuminates. What is true is so by the Truth. Only Christ is the Truth, and only in Christ is Truth attained. Every soul that is illuminated is in the Truth. The first illumination is theological in nature and is given singularly; the other is given to the intellect, whose principles illuminate natural reason, which thus rationally knows the truth and itself becomes the light of sensible things⁵⁹.

In Augustine, one finds a profound doctrine about the interiority of knowledge and the very interiority of the action of teaching. The Master who properly teaches the truth in the soul is Christ Himself, who, as “the one who illuminates every man coming into the world,” is light for the soul. Teaching, therefore, for Augustine, is an illuminating activity; to teach is to illuminate, since to acquire science and learn we are illuminated by God, distinct from us, who shines above us.

2. Reception of Augustinian Thought in Thomas Aquinas's Doctrine on the Teacher

⁵⁷ Augustine of Hippo. *De Magistro*, 14, 45.

⁵⁸ Sciacca, 1955, p. 255.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.



Having seen the main ideas that ground the Augustinian doctrine on the teacher, it is now appropriate to see how these teachings are incorporated and received in the Thomistic doctrine on the action of teaching. The goal is not to extensively review the influence that the Bishop of Hippo exerted on Aquinas, but rather to appreciate how his teachings are present in some key texts where Thomas Aquinas refers to the teacher.

2.1. Memory of Self and Interior Nature of the Act of Learning

One of the crucial issues that Thomas Aquinas received from Augustine, and which constitutes an important part of his vision of the teacher, is the interiority of the act by which science is acquired. Teaching is not an action analogous to that of the sculptor, as Aquinas insists several times, but presupposes the interior and personal action of the learner himself. It is not about emptying the contents from the mind of the teacher into the mind of the disciple, but about helping the disciple generate knowledge within his own interiority. It is the teacher who—by the perfection of the science he possesses—“can provide the disciple with certain instruments so that he can, through the strength and activity of his own understanding, generate knowledge within himself”⁶⁰. This, clearly present in Augustinian thought, where the teacher does not teach in the strict sense, constitutes a fundamental truth in Aquinas’s synthesis, who holds that:

To every man is attached a principle of knowledge, the light of the agent intellect, through which, from the beginning and by nature, certain universal principles common to all sciences are known⁶¹.

The principle of science is within the interior of man, and therefore, he can acquire science by himself. This does not exclude that he may also be helped and guided by the teacher to generate it within himself. In the same Question 117, referring to this very principle, Aquinas holds that just as the internal nature is the principal cause of healing, “so the interior light of the intellect is the principal cause of science”⁶². There is no science

⁶⁰ Bártoli, 2016, p. 59.

⁶¹ Thomas Aquinas. *S. Th.*, I, q.117, a.1, in c.

⁶² Thomas Aquinas. *S. Th.*, I, q.117, a.1, ad 1.



without an action by the disciple himself who understands with his own intellectual light. This same idea also appears in the work *De Veritate*:

Consequently, just as it is said that a physician causes health in the sick by working through nature, so too it is said that a man causes knowledge in another through the operation of the learner's natural reason; and this is teaching⁶³.

The action of learning science by the student is an internal action of the student himself; it is an internal operation of the learner, of his intellect, and in no way can it be replaced in this activity.

In intimate relation to this interior principle, by which science is caused from within, Thomas Aquinas takes up the Augustinian tradition concerning the soul's knowledge of itself and its possession of science, to which he adds the Aristotelian principle that all science and all inquiry proceed from prior knowledge. Indeed, by the light of the active intellect, as we have said, man "from the beginning and by nature" knows certain very universal principles in which all science is contained in some way. In the *Summa Theologiae*, he expresses this negatively by pointing out that the soul "does not possess complete science"⁶⁴. But in light of other texts, it is understood that what Aquinas means is that all science is present in potential. He states this explicitly:

In the one who receives teaching, science preexists not in complete act, certainly, but as in seminal reasons, insofar as the universal conceptions, whose knowledge is naturally imprinted in us, are like certain seeds of all subsequent knowledge. The intellectual power of the student enables the capacity to move from certain things to others, from principles to conclusions. This power is grounded in true, evident, and certain principles, which, following Thomistic theory, are infused by God⁶⁵.

⁶³ Thomas Aquinas. *De Veritate*, q.11, a.1, in c.

⁶⁴ Thomas Aquinas. *S. Th.*, I, q.117, a.1, ad 4).

⁶⁵ Thomas Aquinas. *De Veritate*, q.11, a.1, ad 5).



Therefore, the teacher is not the one who produces the intellectual light, as is explicitly affirmed⁶⁶, because it is God Himself who communicates that light to the soul. As Ibáñez points out:

The intellectual power of the student enables him to have the capacity to move from certain things to others, from principles to conclusions. This power is grounded in true, evident, and certain principles. These principles, according to Thomistic theory, are infused by God⁶⁷.

This further emphasises the interior character that Thomas Aquinas attributes to the act of learning, since he ultimately grounds it—following an Augustinian line—in a participation in the divine light. Aquinas says:

In this sense, it is necessary to say that the human soul knows things in the eternal reasons, through whose participation we know all things. For the intellectual light in us is nothing other than a certain participated likeness of the uncreated light in which the eternal reasons are contained⁶⁸.

We know everything by virtue of that participation. It is that light within us, which is nothing other than the very perfection of the intellectual life of the human understanding that “turns back upon itself and can understand itself”⁶⁹. The soul not only understands but also understands itself. As it is noted elsewhere, “inasmuch as it has being in itself, it returns to itself”⁷⁰. This turning back upon itself is nothing other than subsisting, the soul being present to itself. This presence is the foundation of all knowledge the soul can acquire, and without which it could not generate science.

2.2. *God as the Inner Teacher*

⁶⁶ Thomas Aquinas. *S. Th.*, q.117, a.1, ad 4).

⁶⁷ Ibáñez, 2024, p. 142.

⁶⁸ Thomas Aquinas. *S. Th.*, I, q. 84, a.5, in c.).

⁶⁹ Thomas Aquinas. *Summa contra gentiles*, L. IV, cap. 11.

⁷⁰ Thomas Aquinas. *S. Th.*, I, q.14, a.2, ad 1).



To this interior character of the cognitive act in general and the act of learning in particular, Thomas Aquinas—following a clear Augustinian tradition—incorporates the very action of God as the inner teacher. Indeed, teaching presupposes both the interiority of the learner and the external action of the teacher, but also divine causality. He says in Question 117:

The man who teaches exercises only an external ministry, just as the physician does when healing. But as the internal nature is the principal cause of healing, so the interior light of the intellect is the principal cause of knowledge. Both proceed from God⁷¹.

All the principles previously mentioned appear here perfectly united: the external action, the interiority of the disciple's action, but both having their ultimate foundation in God Himself, who works in everyone who acts and who is ultimately the one who teaches science. This is made even clearer in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. There, Aquinas says that:

Since the external operation of the teacher would produce nothing if there were not in us an intrinsic principle of knowledge, divinely infused, theologians therefore say that 'man teaches by lending his aid, while God, however, works inwardly,' just as the physician, in healing, is called a 'minister of nature'⁷².

Once again, alongside the action of the teacher who helps the disciple, God Himself appears working interiorly as the ultimate cause of the science in the one who learns. This is found even more explicitly, with the same reference to Augustine, in *De Veritate*:

Augustine, regarding what he states in *De Magistro* that only God teaches, does not intend to exclude that man teaches externally, but to affirm that only God teaches inwardly⁷³.

⁷¹ Thomas Aquinas, *S. Th.*, I, q.117, a.1, ad.1.

⁷² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, II, 75.

⁷³ Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q. 11, a.1, ad 8.



The reality is that God illuminates our intellect, and it cannot be otherwise since by the very act that creates the human soul, He preserves and moves it; therefore, although the assent made by the intellect as certain and true occurs within the interior of man, it is nonetheless like a spark of divine truth. God is present in the human soul, even more intimate to the soul than the soul itself, as Augustine pointed out, and thus He grounds all the acquisition of knowledge insofar as He causes the soul to participate in intellectual light and the first conceptions of the intellect. Aquinas himself affirms this:

Therefore, man attains knowledge of the unknown by two ways, namely, through the intellectual light and through the first self-evident conceptions that are compared to that light, which is the agent intellect, as instruments to the craftsman. Now, in both these ways, God is the cause of man's knowledge in the most excellent manner, because He endowed the soul with intellectual light and imprinted on it the knowledge of the first principles, which are like the seeds of the sciences, just as He also imprinted on other natural things the seminal reasons of all the effects they produce⁷⁴.

God is the cause of science from within the very interior of the human intellect. However, this does not diminish the causality of the human who understands, nor of the human teacher who helps him to know. God, teacher, and disciple are causes, but in different ways: God as the first and fundamental cause, while teacher and disciple as secondary causes.

2.3. All Teaching Requires a Word

In the Socratic tradition, the importance of dialogue in the exercise of philosophy in general and teaching in particular is clear and evident. Augustine also recognises the necessity of words to lead the student to knowledge. Although the teacher is not the cause of science, it is through dialogue and the word that he helps the disciple to listen within himself to what the divine Teacher has to say. Thomas Aquinas also aligns himself with this fundamental line of Augustinian pedagogical thought, according to which the

⁷⁴ Thomas Aquinas. *De Veritate*, 11, 3, in c.



teacher's teaching is founded on a word communicated to his disciple so that he may generate science within himself. An external word, given human nature, but above all an interior word, *verbum mentis*, in which the one who teaches has understood the reality of things. For example, Aquinas points out that the teacher "by teaching moves the disciple so that he, by his own understanding, forms intelligible conceptions, whose signs he proposes to him externally"⁷⁵. Indeed, the sensible words of the teacher lead the disciple to form an intelligible conception in his understanding, which is only possible if the external word itself is a sign of that conception.

He who speaks does not teach, as Augustine insisted to his son Adeodatus, but the one who is a true teacher because he knows, because he teaches through his word, which therefore becomes the word of the one who teaches. Thomas Aquinas says:

Hence, the words of the teacher, heard or seen in writing, cause knowledge in the intellect in the same way as the things that are outside the soul, because from both the agent intellect takes intelligible intentions⁷⁶.

Thomas Aquinas places a very special emphasis on the theme of the interior and exterior word, Aristotle being the main influence on the latter, while without doubt, Augustine of Hippo is present in Aquinas regarding the former.

2.4. Illumination and the Teacher

Aquinas adopts, as has been seen and despite notable differences, various aspects of Augustine's doctrine about the teacher and teaching—namely, interiority, the necessity of an interior word, and even the recognition of Christ as the only inner teacher of the disciple. First, because, as Fernández demonstrates, the Augustinian theory of illumination profoundly influences Aquinas's theory of knowledge. Second, and more specifically, it does so in the action of the teacher, as we shall see⁷⁷. However, it is the theme of the teacher's illumination that Aquinas most profoundly embraces from

⁷⁵ Thomas Aquinas. *S. Th.*, I, q.117, a.1, in c.

⁷⁶ Thomas Aquinas. *De Veritate*, q.11, a.1, ad.11.

⁷⁷ Cfr. Fernández, 2023, p. 108.



Augustinian teachings. As we have observed, Augustine grounds all the action of understanding and apprehending science in a divine illumination; that is, God illuminates the mind, and therefore, He is the true Teacher. Aquinas, although situated in a different order, takes up the same idea of illumination to explain the teacher's action⁷⁸. He clearly states in Question 11 of *De Veritate* that one can say:

Man can truly be called a true teacher, inasmuch as he teaches the truth and enlightens the mind, not by infusing light into reason, but by cooperating with the light of reason and providing external aids that assist it in perfecting knowledge⁷⁹.

Indeed, although explicit references are few, it is noticeably clear in Aquinas that the teacher exercises an illuminating action over the disciple in a thoroughly Augustinian line. The teacher is light for the disciple; God is the light that illuminates the disciple, just as Christ is, for Augustine, the inner light for the student. Among all the places where this doctrine appears in Aquinas's work, it is not in Question 11 of *De Veritate* but rather in the first article of Question 117 of the first part of the *Summa Theologiae*, where this illuminating action of the teacher over the disciple is most clearly seen.

The doctrine there does not differ from that in Question 11 of *De Veritate*, nor from other places where Aquinas teaches these matters. Moreover, Aquinas not only teaches by what he says but also by the context in which he says it. This is quite clear when Aquinas explains what education is in his *Commentary on the Sentences* of Peter Lombard⁸⁰. There, he defines education in the context of the natural inclination of all men toward married life, which makes the educational activity appear more clearly as an action by which parents themselves lead their children to their fullness, which is none other than the state of virtue.

⁷⁸ Although there is a similarity and inheritance in the conception of teaching in Thomas Aquinas with respect to Augustinian doctrine, they do not understand the act of teaching in the same way, since Saint Augustine holds that, strictly speaking, the teacher does not teach but rather alerts the disciple so that they may recognize the truth illuminated by the Inner Teacher. In contrast, Thomas Aquinas supports the effective work of teaching by the teacher, who assists the disciple in undertaking within themselves the same intellectual journey that the teacher's reason has undergone. For a deeper exploration of this distinction, compare: Castello Dubra, 2022.

⁷⁹ Thomas Aquinas. *De Veritate*, q.11, a.1, ad.9.

⁸⁰ Thomas Aquinas. *In II Scriptum Super Sententiis.*, d.28, q.1, a.5, ad 3.



But Aquinas also teaches by the context in which he places Question 117, since this question is in the *Treatise on Divine Government of the World*. Indeed, it does not refer to the teacher's action in the treatise on intellectual virtues, nor in that on moral virtues, nor in the treatise on man, nor is it treated concerning social life. Instead, this question is set in the context of how God, using creatures, orders creation to its ultimate end, which is none other than governance and providence.

This treatise is conceived by Aquinas as an order of communication of goodness, an order by which God not only communicates being to the creature but also orders it to its highest perfection and goodness. Yet, to manifest His own goodness even more, He governs creatures relying on their participation, counting on the causality of the creatures themselves. Aquinas visibly teaches this in Question 106, where he affirms that:

Since the end of governance is to lead the things governed to their perfection through it, the better the governance, the greater the perfection achieved by the governor for the things governed. Now, it is a greater perfection for a thing to be not only good in itself but also the cause of goodness in others, than to be good only in itself. Hence, God so governs things that He makes some of them causes of others in governance; as a teacher who not only makes his disciples learned but also capable of teaching others⁸¹.

The order of governance is an order of motion and causality by which God moves all creatures toward their ultimate end, but doing so while taking into account the motion and causality of the creatures themselves. Creatures are not puppets in God's hands; they have ontological consistency and are capable of causing and communicating goodness as well. The example Aquinas uses to explain governance is not that of a king, prince, or military leader, but that of a teacher who imparts knowledge to his disciples so that they, in turn, do the same.

Now, what is that end, that fullness to which God leads creatures, counting on their own causal action? To understand this, we turn to a text from Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, where he says: "The ultimate end of the universe is,

⁸¹ Thomas Aquinas. *S. Th.*, I, q. 106, a.3.



therefore, the good of the intellect, which is truth. It is reasonable, consequently, that truth is the ultimate end of the universe”⁸². Thus, the order of governance as a communication of good does not imply any good, but the good of the intellect, leading the rational creature so that God is known, so that Truth is known. Therefore, the order of governance is an order of communication and manifestation of truth, that is, an order of illumination, because, as Aquinas teaches in this treatise on governance, to illuminate is nothing other than to manifest truth to another⁸³.

Hence, the order presented in the treatise is an order of illumination: beginning with how God illuminates intellectual creatures (q. 105), how one angel illuminates another angel (q. 106), how an angel illuminates man (q. 111), and finally, in that same line, how one man teaches another man (q. 117). The entire treatise is conceived according to an order of illumination, of manifestation of truth. This makes it even more evident that providence and governance presuppose and continue creation, since creation itself, as it is pointed out Arbeláez *et al.*,:

can be understood as a luminous whole within which, speaking through images, there is a polychrome of tonalities, where the luminous power of being transverses all the determinations that conform beings⁸⁴.

Even without explicitly speaking of illumination in the case of the human teacher, it is clear that the good communicated is the good of the intellect—that is, truth.

Placing the causal action of the teacher in this context and order makes it evident that the action of teaching—that is, illuminating another—is part of a dynamic of communicating good. Thus, the teacher’s action cannot be understood as coercion or limitation that impedes the creativity or growth of the student in knowledge, but as help that strengthens and improves the disciple.

Understanding the teacher’s action as illumination of the disciple’s intellect means understanding it as an action that participates in God’s illuminating action upon all intellectual creatures and, therefore, as communication of the supreme Good, which by

⁸² Thomas Aquinas. *Summa contra gentiles*, L.I, cap. 1

⁸³ Thomas Aquinas. *S. Th.*, I, q. 106, a.1

⁸⁴ Arbeláez & Soto Bruna, 2024, p. 5.



its nature is diffusive of itself, but also of truth, which is the perfection of the intellect. The teacher is a collaborator with God Himself in the sublime task of leading creation to its highest fullness.

In other words, placing the teacher within the order of providence splendidly manifests the synthesis that Thomas Aquinas achieves by balancing the various causalities involved in the disciple's acquisition of science: the causality of God, the causality of the disciple, and the causality of the teacher. Absolutising or excessively emphasising any one of these causalities has led to various errors in education.

Thomas Aquinas, based on the consideration of the higher order of the motion of creatures, safeguards in its perfection and hierarchy the various causalities ordered toward a single effect: the generation of science in the disciple. He achieves this precisely by aligning not only with Aristotle—as he explicitly states, who recognises the external causality of the teacher—but above all by grounding himself in the reception and acceptance of Augustinian thought, placing the action of teaching within the governance of the universe as a divine illumination.

God, who works in all that he works, is the first and interior cause of science, giving his Light to participate in created understandings: “The light of Your face is impressed upon us”. God is thus the inner Teacher of every man, as explicitly taught by Augustine. Denying this causality is to misunderstand the very order of the universe and divine omnipotence itself, because situated within the order of divine governance, the more the action is from God, the more it is also from the creature, since God Himself gives the creature its capacity to act and to illuminate.

Therefore, although God works in all who act, the creature also possesses its own action. God wills to give the creature, to make it properly active and efficient. This is the order willed by God: that to manifest His goodness, He also communicates causality to creatures. That is, the fact that God causes interiorly—as taught by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas with him—does not prevent the creature from also acting and being capable of causing. God causes science in the disciple, but the disciple himself is a cause of science in his understanding by virtue of his active intellect. Thomas Aquinas says:



For to every man is attached a principle of knowledge, the light of the agent intellect, through which, from the beginning and by nature, certain universal principles common to all sciences are known. When one applies these universal principles to particular cases, the memory or experience of which is supplied by the senses, through his own investigation he acquires knowledge of things he did not know, passing from the known to the unknown⁸⁵.

The action of the teacher, in this way, fully exalts the divine order that seeks for Truth to be known and manifested. This is especially interesting and deserves emphasis. Indeed, God has willed to share His light with the intellectual creature, illuminating the creature so that it may, by itself and with full “autonomy” cause science within itself. Yet, at the same time—and this is more Thomistic than Augustinian—God has willed teachers who are capable of communicating science to others through their own action. Moreover, in the order of divine governance, in the order of that divine illumination, it seems that God has willed the teacher even more than the creature’s own capacity to generate knowledge by itself, because teaching is more natural to the human being than acquiring every single piece of knowledge by oneself.

Thus, Thomas Aquinas does not deny Augustine’s fundamental teaching that the teacher’s action is an illuminating action whose ultimate foundation is God, the true light of true light.

Conclusion

It can be affirmed with complete clarity that although Aquinas wrote Question 11 of *De Veritate* considering Augustine’s *De Magistro* as a possible objection, and while responding he embraces Aristotle’s line that the teacher is the efficient cause of science in another, it has been shown in this reflection how Augustinian thought is not contrary to Aquinas’s thought. Rather, it is assumed and received in all that is true, providing coherence to a vision of the teacher that synthesises Aristotle with the full richness of interiority and illumination contributed by Augustinian thought.

⁸⁵ Thomas Aquinas. *S. Th.* I, q.117, a.1, in c.



This synthesis prevents confusing the causality of the student in the act of learning with the causality of the teacher, while also safeguarding and clearly affirming the causality of God Himself—the true inner teacher who causes science in the disciple.



Bibliography

- Amado F., A., & Letelier Widow, G. (2023). En el verbo está la luz: enseñanza e iluminación según Tomás de Aquino. *Scripta Mediaevalia*, 16(1), 13-46.
- Agustín de Hipona. (2003). *El maestro o sobre el lenguaje*. Editorial Trotta.
- Agustín de Hipona. (1948). *Obras de San Agustín*. Primera versión española, Introducción y notas del Padre Fr. Luis Arias O.S.A. BAC.
- Augustine of Hippo. (1991). On the Trinity (*De Trinitate*), translation based on Edmund Hill, O.P., *The Trinity, The Works of Saint Augustine*, (3), Hyde Park, New City Press.
- Augustine of Hippo. (1966). *Of True Religion*. Westminster Press.
- Agustín de Hipona. (2014). *Soliloquios*. Editorial Rialp.
- Arbeláez, J. E., & Soto-Bruna, M. J. (2024). Illuminating Causality: The Role of Light in Thomas Aquinas's Metaphysics of Being. *Religions*, 15, (11), pp. 1-11.
- Augustine of Hippo. (1968). The Teacher (*De Magistro*), translated by Robert P. Russell, O.S.A., *Saint Augustine: The Teacher – The Free Choice of the Will – Grace and Free Will*. The Fathers of the Church, 59, Catholic University of America Press.
- Augustine of Hippo. (2010). *Retractations*. The Catholic University of America Press (CUA Press).
- Bártoli, M. (2016). El maestro como causa instrumental de la ciencia en Tomás de Aquino: una cuestión controvertida, *Revista Chilena de Estudios Medievales*, (10), 45-59.
- Calabrese, C. (2020). Una comprensión de la realidad en clave neoplatónica. Dos pasajes del De ordine de San Agustín. *Revista De Humanidades*, 41, 105-128.
<https://revistahumanidades.unab.cl/index.php/revista-de-humanidades/article/view/44>
- Castelló, J.A. (2022). Del “maestro interior” al “asistente de la razón”: los *De magistro* de Agustín de Hipona y de Tomás de Aquino. *Revista Humanitas Hodie*, 5,(1), 47-65.
<https://doi.org/10.28970/hh.2022.1.a3>
- Copleston, F. (2000). *Historia de la Filosofía*, 4ª ed., Ariel Filosofía, T. II.



- Fernández, M. (2023). La epistemología de la fe en San Agustín y Santo Tomás: un estudio comparativo. *Anuario Filosófico*, 56(1), 89-112.
- Gilson, E. (2022). *Introducción al estudio de San Agustín*. Alfa–Athanasius.
- Gilson, E. (1983). *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, translated by L. E. M. Lynch, Random House. Vintage Books.
- Granados, J. & Granados, J.A. (2009). *La alianza educativa. Introducción al arte de vivir*. Editorial Monte Carmelo.
- Ibáñez, C. (2024). La enseñanza y su finalidad según Tomás de Aquino: Análisis basado en el ejemplo de la pedagogía de Cristo y en su propia experiencia como maestro. *Síntesis Revista de Filosofía*. VII, (2), 115-147.
<https://sisntesis.uaí.cl/index.php/intusfilosofia/article/view/459/428>
- López, A. (2020). The Epistemological Foundations of Augustine and Aquinas: A Comparative Study. *Theological Studies*, 81, (4), 845-867.
- Osuna, A. (2001). El maestro. Introducción, Tomás de Aquino. *Opúsculos y cuestiones selectas. Filosofía (1)*. Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos.
- Pérez-Estévez, A. (1996). Ciencia y docencia en Agustín y Tomás de Aquino, *Revista Española de Filosofía Medieval*, 3, 103-114.
- Pierantoni, C. (2011) El verbum cordis formabile agustiniano y la imagen trinitaria en el hombre, *Teología y Vida*, LII, 197-210.
- Platón. (1988). *La República*. Editorial Gredos.
- Plato. (2013). *Republic*. Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press.
- Plotino. (1998). *Enéadas*. Editorial Gredos.
- Plotinus. (2018). *The Enneads*, Cambridge University Press.
- Reale, G. & Antiseri, D. (1992). *Historia del pensamiento filosófico y científico*. 2ª edición, Editorial Herder.
- Sciacca. M. F. (1955). *San Agustín*. Luis Miracle.
- Thomae Aquinatis. *Opera Omnia*. Recognovit ac instruxit Enrique Alarcón automato electrónico. Pompaelone ad Unversitatis Studiorum Navarrensis aedes a MM A.D. Corpus Thomisticum. <www.corpusthomisticum.org> (Consultado en línea entre el 2 de mayo y el 25 de mayo de 2025).
- Thomas Aquinas. (1952). *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate*. [Translated by Robert W. Mulligan] S.J., Ed. Henry Regnery Company.



Thomas Aquinas. (1947). *Summa Theologiae*. Dominican Fathers, Benziger Bros. edition.

Tomás de Aquino. (1967). *Suma contra gentiles*. [Segunda edición dirigida por Laureano Robles y Adolfo Robles O.P.]. Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos.

Vilarroig, J. & Monfort Prades, J.M. & Mira de Orduña y Gil, J.M. (2023). Platón, San Agustín y San Anselmo: tres buscadores de la verdad. Ejemplo de la verdad del hombre, *SCIO. Revista de Filosofía*, 24, 25-51.