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On the mode of the knower and of human understanding

Kojiro Nakayama

The proposition, "Cognitio enim contingit secundum quod cognitum est in cognoscente" (S. th., I~I, q. a. 4), is well-known as one of the principal theses in the thomistic theory of cognition. Thomas considered that the thing known is in the knower according to the mode of the knower (modus cognoscentis).

But it is not so clear in this proposition what the mode of the knower means in respect to human cognition. For, if we interpret it as the mode of understanding (modus intelligendi) which is the natural mode of intellect, there arise the following difficult questions.

The first is whether the mode of the understanding subject who is the knower determines the mode of the thing known. The second is whether, in order to understand all other things, it is necessary that the knower apprehends his own mode of understanding prior to knowing all other things. If we considered these questions in terms of Kantian Critique, we would misinterpret them by applying a subjectivistic view to the epistemological theory of thomistic ontology which is essentially objectivistic.

The present paper gives an ontological solution to these problems and makes clear what the mode of the knower's own nature means in the thomistic theory of human cognition, by criticizing Kant's critique of the Paralogism of rational psychology in his transcendental dialectic in "The Critique of Pure Reason" and by pointing out Kant's misunderstanding of the necessary conditions for human cognition.