Abstract. Aquinas presents his most complete exposition of the transcendentals in De veritate 1, 1, that deals with the question “What is truth?”. The thesis of this paper is that the question of truth is essential for the understanding of his doctrine of the transcendentals.

The first part of the paper (sections 1—4) analyzes Thomas’s conception of truth. Two approaches to truth can be found in his work. The first approach, based on Aristotle’s claim that “truth is not in things but in the mind”, leads to the idea that the proper place of truth is in the intellect. The second approach is ontological: Thomas also acknowledges that there is truth in every being. The famous definition of truth as “adequation of thing and intellect” enables him to integrate the two approaches. Truth is a relation between two terms, both of which can be called “true” because both are essential for the conformity between thing and intellect.

The second part of the paper (sections 5—7) deals with the manner in which Thomas gives truth a place in the doctrine of the transcendentals, and shows that his conception of truth leads to important innovations in this doctrine: the introduction of relational transcendentals and the correlation between spirit and being. If “truth” is transcendental, it must be convertible with “being”. Sect. 6 discusses objections that Thomas advances himself to this convertibility. Sect. 7 deals with a difficulty in his account of truth as a relational transcendental. Ontological truth expresses a relation to an intellect but the relation to the human intellect is accidental for the truth of things. Essential for their truth can only be a practical intellect that causes things. In this way, Thomas argues, the divine intellect relates to all things.

Thomas Aquinas never wrote a separate treatise on the transcendentals. He does, however, present a comparatively extensive exposition of this subject in his disputed questions De veritate, which date from around 1255. Q. 1, a. 1, deals with the question “What is truth?”, and contains Thomas’s most complete account of the concepts that “express a general mode of being”. In the secondary literature this account is often discussed in isolation from the context of the question of truth within which it is found. In my paper I intend to show that this context is essential for the understanding of Thomas’s doctrine of the transcendentals. My thesis is that it is precisely in relation to his conception of truth that the originality of Thomas’s doctrine becomes manifest, and that it is not by accident he presents his most complete exposition of it in De veritate 1, 1.

I develop this thesis in two parts. The first part (Sections 1—4) analyzes Thomas’s conception of truth, and shows that his conception differs fundamentally from that of his contemporaries, particularly at those points regarded as essential conditions for the transcendentality of truth at the time. The second part (Sections 5—7) deals with the manner in which Thomas gives truth a place in the doctrine of the transcendentals. In this part it will become clear that his conception of truth leads to important innovations in this doctrine.

(1) A “magisterial” definition of truth: “the indivision of being and that which is”

In his reply to the question as to what truth is, Thomas mentions in De veritate 1, 1, several definitions of truth from the history of philosophy. He presents definitions from Greek philosophy (Aristotle), the patristic period (Augustine and Hilary of Poitiers), early medieval thought (Anselm of Canterbury), and Arabic philosophy (Avicenna). Another definition of truth that appears is the formula “adequation of thing and intellect”, which Thomas attributes to a Jewish philosopher of the tenth century, Isaäc Israëli. Scholars have not been able, however, to locate this definition in his works. In addition, Thomas mentions an anonymous definition: “The true is the indivision of being and that which is” (verum est indivisio esse et quod est). It is to this latter definition that I want to devote attention initially.

In another work (In I Sent., 19, 5, 1) Thomas calls this definition magistri alis, which means that it was the definition of the magistri of the university. Indeed, we find this definition in Albert the Great, Alexander of Hales, and Bonaventure. Of the definitions presented in De veritate, the indivision formula is thus the most recent one.
The origin of this definition can be traced back to the *Summa de bono* (1230) of Philip the Chancellor. This fact is of great importance because Philip’s work, written twenty-five years before Thomas’s *De veritate*, is usually regarded as the first account of the transcendentals. In the Prologue of his *Summa*, Philip says that he will deal with what is most general, namely, “being”, “one”, “true”, and “good.” In the second question he discusses the relation of the true to being. The starting point of Philip’s discussion are five definitions of truth, which are also mentioned by Thomas in *De veritate*, namely, the definitions of Augustine, Hilary of Poitiers, Anselm, the adequation formula, and, finally, the definition in terms of indivisibility. Philip asks which of these definitions is the most appropriate. He objects to Hilary’s definition (“Truth is that which declares or manifests being”), because it contains a reference to a knowing subject. The true must be defined “without any relation to an intellect.” The definition, “adequation of thing and intellect”, expresses, according to Philip, a secondary type of truth, namely, the truth of the sign, because the adequation in question must be understood in terms of a mental sign and the thing signified. From these objections it is obvious that he is seeking a purely ontological definition of truth. Augustine’s definition “The true is that which is” (*de quod est*) seems then to be a suitable candidate, for in his definition Augustine deliberately eliminates the relation to a knowing subject. Such a relation would “relativize” truth. Truth resides solely in the thing itself, expressing its intelligibility. Thus, truth is identical with being, and this means, in the terminology of thirteenth-century philosophy, that truth is a transcendental property.

Indeed, Philip is of the opinion that Augustine’s definition indicates what truth is *seundum substantiam*. Yet he is not satisfied with this definition because it insufficiency expresses that by which truth, *qua conceptus* (*rationem*), differs from being. The statement “every being is true” threatens to become a tautology. Augustine’s definition must therefore be modified, and this modification gives rise to the fifth definition mentioned by Philip: “the true is the indivision of being (*esse*) and that which is”.

Philip says of this definition that “it is taken a *Metaphysicis*”. The modern editor of the *Summa* confesses that he could not find the definition in the *Metaphysics*. He is in good company, for a similar remark was made in the thirteenth century by Albert the Great. That their search was unsuccessful is not surprising, however, for it seems plausible that it was Philip himself who framed this definition. He borrowed its elements from two “metaphysicians”, Aristotle and Boethius.

The central element in his definition is the notion of “indivision”. Now, it is striking that earlier in the *Summa* Philip defines “the good” in terms of “indivision” also. The reason he adduces for this is that the most general must be defined “in the way one (*unum*) is defined”, that is, by a negation. He does not clarify, however, why “one” should be the model for defining the other transcendentals. The explanation for his strategy must be sought in a discussion of Aristotle’s definition, which was the basis for the medieval doctrine of the transcendentals.

In Book IV of the *Metaphysics* (c. 2, 1003 b 22ff.) Aristotle discusses the relation between being and one. This relation is marked by identity and difference. Being and one are interchangeable, for they are “the same nature”. Yet the terms “being” and “one” are not synonyms, for the concept of “one” is different from that of “being”. What is conceptually expressed by “one” is the “undividedness” of being. From this it follows that one adds something to being without this addition entailing a limitation of its extension. One retains its comprehensive, transcendental character, because it only adds something conceptual, a negation, to being. That is the reason why Philip prefers to define the other transcendentals following the model established by one. Truth must be defined in terms of indivision.

Philip defines truth as “the indivision of being and that which is”. The last part of the definition is borrowed from Boethius’s *De hebdomadibus*, a treatise in which a number of propositions about the structure of being that played a great role in medieval ontology are presented. One of these, to which Philip explicitly refers, reads: “In every composite to be (*esse*) is one thing, that which is another.” The definition of truth brings out that these components are undivided, that is, united.

From the analysis of this “magisterial” definition it becomes clear which conception of truth is behind the incorporation of truth in the doctrine of the transcendentals. Philip’s definition formulates the conditions for the transcendentality of the true. First, truth must be conceived purely ontologically; any relation to the intellect must be eliminated. Second, truth must be conceived as a negation, as indivision, in keeping with