

“Aquinas and the Platonists”¹

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1. Introduction: Conscious and Unconscious Platonism

As with all thinkers who treat the philosophies on which they depend, Aquinas has two relations to his predecessors and, in particular, to the Platonic tradition. One is that of which he is conscious, sets out explicitly, is part of how he places himself within the history of philosophy, and is essential to his understanding of that place. The other is the unconscious dependence. In every thinker these will diverge to some extent. First, no previous philosophy can answer later questions without being altered by the questioner: a thing is received according to the mode of the receiver! The alteration made by present need is especially marked in the schools deriving from the Hellenistic philosophies with their dependence on the exegesis of authoritative texts constantly reread to supply answers required by the new needs of thought.² Second, no one is capable of a complete grasp of what forms and moves their own thought. In the case of Thomas' relation to Platonism, the divergences, inconsistencies, and even contradictions between what he says about Platonism, how he places himself in respect to it, and its real influence on his thought are very great.

In fact, Thomas' own system stands within a tradition whose foundation, as he represents it, he self-consciously opposes. Because his understanding of the Platonic tradition is deeply problematic in many ways, while his knowledge of it is extensive, and because the tradition is itself so complex, Aquinas is frequently (or, better, normally) criticising one aspect of Platonism from the perspective of another. Such internal criticism is characteristic of Plato's thought and of its tradition. The ancient Platonists were, however, far better informed about the history of the tradition in which they stood than were their Latin mediaeval successors. The Platonists of late antiquity upon whom Thomas depends for much of his understanding of the history of philosophy had not the degree of naïveté present in the self-opposition which characterizes Thomas' relation to Platonism.

Getting hold of Thomas' self-conscious relation to Platonism has been largely accomplished and many of the tools to complete the task are available. The lexicographical aspect of the work was substantially done almost fifty years ago by R.J. Henle. His *Saint Thomas and Platonism. A Study of the Plato and Platonic Texts in the Writings of Saint Thomas* is almost complete in terms of the texts it considers. Henle lavishly reproduces the relevant passages in Latin. For the most part he gives the likely sources of the doctrines attributed to the Platonists with the accuracy possible when he wrote. His analysis, within the parameters he sets and which his perspective sets for him, is thorough and inescapable.³ Beyond Henle's work it is necessary to add the few texts he missed,⁴ to correct his work on the basis

¹ Revisions suggested by Ian Stewart and Taneli Kukkonen saved this paper from many follies and obscurities. I thank them.

² For a consideration of this, especially as it applies within the Platonic tradition, see P. Hadot, 'Philosophie exégèse et contresens', reprinted in idem, *Études de philosophie ancienne*, Paris 1998 (Les Belles Lettres: L'ane d'or), 3-11.

³ R.J. Henle, *Saint Thomas and Platonism. A Study of the Plato and Platonic Texts in the Writings of Saint Thomas*, The Hague 1956.

⁴ The other texts are supplied by B. Montagnes and C. Vansteenkiste in their reviews of Henle's book in *Revue thomiste* 57 (1957), 587-591 and *Angelicum* 34 (1957), 318-328, respectively. See J.-P. Torrell, *Initiation à saint Thomas d'Aquin. Sa personne et son oeuvre*, Paris / Fribourg 1993 (Cerf / Editions Universitaires de Fribourg: Pensée antique et médiévale, Vestigia 13), 188, note 40. The list in Vansteenkiste's review, entitled 'Platone e S.

of better editions than the ones he had available (or used), and to compensate for the limits of his undertaking and his biases. The principal problems with Henle's work, once we accept its limits, lie in the vestiges of the neo-Scholastic mentality he retains. This mentality is opposed to that of the historian and was antipathetic to Platonic idealism.⁵ On this account, like Aquinas himself, he misses the extent to which Thomas' representation of Platonism and of his own relation to it actually stand within its long and diverse tradition.

Henle's work accurately describes how for Aquinas a philosophical school is a fixed way of thinking which results in "a series of like statements formulated in the several minds that teach it and learn it, that write it and read it" (as Mark Jordan puts it).⁶ Despite accepting this definition of a "philosophical teaching" from Jordan, as well as his crucial point that Aquinas is not a philosopher whose position is an 'Aristotelianismus' in an Enlightenment or neo-Scholastic manner, I shall continue to write herein both of "Platonism" and of Thomas' Platonism. As a matter of fact, for Aquinas, what the *Platonici* teach has been reduced to a fixed *way* of thinking which he treats ahistorically although he knows much of its history. Further, at several crucial points, he self-consciously sides with them. In rescuing Aquinas from neo-Scholastic representations of his philosophy, Jordan is importantly right that Aquinas did not think of Christians as philosophers. He neglects, however, the continuities which do exist between Scholastic and neo-Scholastic treatments of philosophy. Henle, working within these, through his analysis of the texts in which Thomas speaks of Plato and the *Platonici*, shows how Platonism is presented as one of these *viae*.

This *via* Thomas criticises, and for most purposes finds the way of Aristotle superior, even if he may accept some of the positions at which the Platonists arrive, positions which also may be reached otherwise. For Thomas, Platonism has a fundamental point of departure, established in Plato's attempt to save certain knowledge from the consequences of the doctrine of the ancient Physicists (*Priores Naturales*) with whom he accepts that philosophy began. For him, Plato's flawed solution to the epistemological problem determines Platonic ontology. The Platonic philosophical position as a whole proceeds according to a distinct method of reasoning to arrive at positions. It is a series of syllogisms whose basic premises are deficient.

In the thirteenth century only the *Meno*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Timaeus* were available to the Latin West. Henle concluded that Aquinas had no direct knowledge of any of them.⁷ Thus, much as with Augustine,⁸ he knows only what he takes to be Plato's doctrines and is without knowledge of the dialogues themselves. Thomas' approach to philosophy gave him little sympathy for the kind of dialectic by which the fundamentals of philosophy are questioned and reconsidered within and between the dialogues. The substance of Thomas'

Tommaso', is the more extensive (running to almost six pages) and like Henle he reproduces the relevant passages. He admits, however, that these passages would not modify Henle's analysis substantially. Montagnes suggests that texts parallel to those explicitly speaking of Plato and the *Platonici* should be examined and gives some examples (588).

⁵ On the antipathy to Platonism belonging to the 19th century Thomistic revival see W.J. Hankey, 'Denys and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold and Postmodern Hot', *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community*, ed. L. Ayres and G. Jones, London and New York 1998 (Routledge, Studies in Christian Origins), 139-184 and idem, 'Making Theology Practical: Thomas Aquinas and the Nineteenth Century Religious Revival', *Dionysius* 9 (1985), 85-127.

⁶ M.D. Jordan, *The Alleged Aristotelianism of Thomas Aquinas*, Toronto 1992 (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies: The Etienne Gilson Series 15), 5.

⁷ Henle, *Saint Thomas*, xxi.

⁸ See F. Van Fleteren, 'Plato, Platonism,' *Saint Augustine through the Ages: an Encyclopedia*, ed. A. Fitzgerald (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999), 631-654.

own thinking shows almost no development -- except, significantly, by his coming to accept that knowledge involves the formation of a Plotinian - Augustinian inner word in the mind, the *verbum mentis*.⁹ There is certainly no development remotely comparable to that within Plato's *corpus*. In consequence, his picture of Plato's way of thinking is not only lacking in the most basic information but is also without the intellectual necessities for a sympathetic representation.

2. Thomas and the Platonic Tradition

None of this means that Aquinas' thinking about Platonism lies totally outside the Platonic tradition. On the contrary, a great part of his information about Plato and Platonism comes from the Platonists of late Antiquity, Christian and pagan. His representation of the philosophical *viae* derives crucially from them and from their projects. The major *genres* of his work -- both the commentaries on philosophical and religious texts and also the total theological systems reconciling philosophy and religion as well as the contradictions between authorities -- develop from within the patterns they established. The Platonists set the forms of that branch of antique Scholasticism which the Christians found it most suitable to continue. As with them, philosophy is for Aquinas an essential part of a religious way of life; ultimately the philosophers are to be reconciled for the sake of that life.¹⁰ In the reaction of Thomistic scholarship against the distortions of the neo-Scholastic representations of his philosophy, and in the consequent repositioning of Thomas' philosophy within his theology, we must not forget that the first to carry out this repositioning of philosophy were the Neoplatonists.

Philosophy functions for Aquinas within theology as *sacra doctrina* in a way analogous to its place in the systems of the later Neoplatonists.¹¹ Philosophical reasoning has a comparable relation to the authority of great teachers and sacred texts: it is exegetical, traditional and hierarchical.¹² Mark Jordan judges that, in contrast to Aristotle, Thomas "adopts something much more like the Platonic hierarchy [of the sciences]".¹³ In fact, hierarchy does derive the character it has for Aquinas from post-Plotinian (Iamblichan, Proclan or Dionysian) Neoplatonism.¹⁴ The dialectic of the *quaestio* aims for the

⁹ See P. Vanier, *Théologie trinitaire chez s. Thomas d'Aquin. Evolution du concept d'action notionelle*, Montréal/Paris 1953 (Université de Montréal Publications de l'institut d'études médiévales 13); W.J. Hankey, *God in Himself, Aquinas' Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae*, Oxford 1987 (Oxford Theological Monographs), 133; D.J. Merriell, *To the Image of the Trinity. A Study in the Development of Aquinas' Teaching*, Toronto 1990 (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies: Studies and Texts 96).

¹⁰ For the briefest possible treatment of these issues in the philosophy of late Antiquity and the continuity up to Aquinas, see H.-D. Saffrey, 'Les débuts de la théologie comme science (IIIe-VIe)', *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 80:2 (Avril, 1996), 213ff., translation by W.J. Hankey, 'Theology as science (3rd-6th centuries)', *Studia Patristica*, vol. XXIX, ed. E.A. Livingstone, Leuven 1997, 332ff.

¹¹ On the ancients see P. Hadot, 'Théologie, exégèse, révélation, écriture, dans la philosophie grecque', reprinted in idem, *Études de philosophie ancienne*, Paris 1998 (Les Belles Lettres: L'ane d'or), 27-58. On Aquinas, see Hankey, *God in Himself*, 3-12, 19-35 and idem, 'Theology as System and as Science: Proclus and Aquinas', *Dionysius* 6 (1982), 83-93.

¹² M.D. Jordan, *Ordering Wisdom. The Hierarchy of Philosophical Discourses in Aquinas*, Notre Dame, Indiana 1986 (The University of Notre Dame Publications in Medieval Studies XXIV), 185-201.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹⁴ On hierarchy see D.J. O'Meara, 'The hierarchical ordering of reality in Plotinus', *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd Gerson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 66-81. On something of its character and functions in Aquinas, see W.J. Hankey, 'Aquinas, Pseudo-Denys, Proclus and Isaiah VI.6', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 64 (1997), 59-93 and L. Dewan, 'Objectum. Notes on the Invention of a Word', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 48 (1981), 37-96.

reconciliation of a hierarchy of authorities and discourses in which philosophy has a subordinate place. There is a testing of the first principles of reason, but “it is a procedure of dialectical inquiry which begins from received philosophical opinions, that is, from philosophical traditions.”¹⁵ Its purpose is a didactic persuasion rather than philosophical discovery.

Despite what he derives from and has in common with the Platonists of late Antiquity, Thomas lacks much of their understanding of the history of Platonism. For the most part, he regards the Platonic tradition ahistorically, as if all of it were present simultaneously. This is characteristic of his manner of thinking. Thus, in a comparable way, he ignores the form of St. Paul’s Epistles and the differences between them in virtue of the occasions in which they were written and the various audiences they addressed. Thomas treats the Epistles as if they were parts of a single text, and his task was to “clarify its inner structure, the exact sequence and the connection of the ideas” in it, so as to answer his own questions about the life of grace.¹⁶ Nonetheless, through the course of his life, Aquinas does gain an extensive direct knowledge of the Platonic tradition in late Antiquity, a knowledge which grew very considerably, especially as a result of translations of pagan treatises and commentaries which he acquires mostly after 1260. In consequence, over the course of his writing, he is forced to change his judgments on the authorship and character of very authoritative texts. Remarkably, despite this, Thomas mostly keeps on treating Platonism as one changeless form of argument. The fact is (as we shall see in what follows) history and hermeneutical traditions are not matters of primary interest to him. His subordination of the hermeneutical applies to his own self-consciousness as well as to his treatment of the perspectives of others. Thus, Thomas seems not to reflect on how his growing knowledge of the history of the Platonic tradition is producing inconsistencies in his judgments about it.

This is not to say that Thomas had no sense for the Platonic tradition. The opposite must be asserted firmly. Aquinas knew and was an heir of its sophisticated tradition of exegesis and commentary. It required the abilities to distinguish positions subtly, to discover what was hidden in poetic and obscure speech, to delimit schools and trace lines of connection between thinkers, and to discern the differences between ways of speaking. Moreover, he manifests the requisite gifts, especially in his last works which are also those with the deepest, most extensive and most sympathetic knowledge of Greek Platonism.¹⁷ Contrasting Albert the Great and Aquinas, Alain de Libera writes: “Thomas définit les platonismes *en philologie*, dans l’horizon herméneutique de Macrobe, d’Aristote, de Proclus et de Denys”.¹⁸ This judgment is generally correct and, indeed, I shall add names to this list so as to show that Thomas’ hermeneutical horizon was profoundly, extensively and subtly Platonist. It will also appear that, whatever his assessment of the weight to give to interpretative perspective, he did discern the difference between Platonic and Aristotelian

¹⁵ Jordan, *Ordering Wisdom*, 190.

¹⁶ O.H. Pesch, ‘Paul as Professor of Theology. The Image of the Apostle in St. Thomas’ Theology’, *The Thomist* 38 (1974), 589.

¹⁷ On which see de Libera in Thomas d’Aquin, *L’Unité de l’intellect contre les Averroïstes suivi des Textes contre Averroès antérieurs à 1270*, texte latin, traduction, introduction, biographie, chronologie, notes et index par A. de Libera, 2nd edition, Paris 1997, 47 ff.; Aquinas, *Super Librum De Causis Expositio*, ed. H.-D. Saffrey, Fribourg/Louvain 1954 (Textus Philosophici Friburgenses 4/5). vii-xxxvii; A. de Libera, ‘Albert le Grand et Thomas d’Aquin interprètes du *Liber de Causis*’, *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 74 (1990), 347-78.

¹⁸ A. de Libera, ‘Albert le Grand et le platonisme. de la doctrine de idées à la théorie des trois états de l’universel’, *On Proclus and his Influence in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. E.P. Bos and P.A. Meijer, Leiden, 1992 (Brill, *Philosophia Antiqua* 53), 89-90.

hermeneutical approaches. Especially in the last decade of his life, he becomes ever more deeply both knowledgeable about and inserted within the interpretative mentalities of late Antiquity. In great part, he owes this to the translations of the Greek commentators made by William of Moerbeke. Having helped destroy the myth of a special relation between William and Aquinas, so far as the translations of Aristotle were concerned, R.A. Gauthier, that great discerner of Thomas' sources, was right to insist on the enormous debt Thomas owed Moerbeke for his translations of the commentaries.¹⁹

3. The Sources of Thomas' Platonism

(a) Christian Fathers

The profound influence of Platonism on Thomas' own thought is evident from the beginning. His always growing knowledge of the tradition derives from Aristotle and from the diverse Middle and Neo-Platonisms: pagan, Christian, Arabic and Jewish. The texts on which his knowledge depends improve throughout his life but one is struck by the number of late Greek Platonic texts and Aristotelian commentaries he comes to know, always in translation of course. Without being exhaustive, and dependent on the ever more and more precise work of the editors of his texts, we can list the major sources of the diverse forms under which Thomas received what he knew of the Hellenistic Platonisms as follows.

With a right to first place are the auspices of Augustine and the pseudo-Dionysius. In the case of Augustine, from the beginning of his own writing, Thomas is clear that the Bishop of Hippo was *imbutus* with the doctrine of the *Platoniorum*, which "he follows so far as this is possible to be done in accord with the truth of the Faith" (*sequitur quantum fieri potest secundum fidei veritatem*). In consequence of this limit, he judges that Augustine may recite doctrines he does not assert.²⁰ Helpfully, unlike the Pseudo-Dionysius, Augustine is explicit both about what he finds acceptable, superior to other philosophies, and even necessary for Christian faith within Platonism, and also about what he judges to be erroneous in it. As a result, Thomas is able to control his own relation to Augustine's Platonism to a greater degree than he is able to do with his other Patristic sources. He learns criticisms of its positions from him and discovers assertions about what in it is incompatible with Christianity. Boethius, next in importance after Augustine and Dionysius, is not by any means so clear. Thomas wrote expositions of his *De Trinitate* and *De Hebdomadibus* and cites and depends upon the *Consolatio Philosophiae*, commentaries, and translations of Boethius.²¹ The same lack of clarity holds for other Christian 'Fathers'. The *De Natura Hominis* of Nemesius, he cites often and from the beginning of his writing. It is an important source of his knowledge of Platonism, but Thomas supposed it to have been written by Gregory of Nyssa.²²

The authority of these Patristic texts surpassed all others for him except the Bible

¹⁹ R.A. Gauthier in Aquinas, *Expositio Libri Posteriorum*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Editio altera retractata: Rome 1989 (Commissio Leonina: *Opera Omnia Sancti Thomae de Aquino*, vol. 1, pars 2), 55*.

²⁰ Aquinas, *Questiones Disputatae De Veritate*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Rome 1973 (Commissio Leonina: *Opera Omnia Sancti Thomae de Aquino* vol. 22, part 3), quest. 21, art. 4, ad 3, p. 603; idem, *Summa Theologiae*, Ottawa 1953, pars 1, quest. 84, art. 5, resp.; *ibid.*, quest. 77, art 5, ad 3; idem, *Tractatus De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, editio critica L. W. Keeler, Rome 1959 (Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana Textus et Documenta, series philosophica 13), art. 10, ad 8, p. 132; Jordan, *The Alleged Aristotelianism*, 40 compares Augustine's judgment of philosophy in *De Civitate Dei* with Aristotle as a source for Thomas' relation to Platonism.

²¹ See R. McInerny, *Boethius and Aquinas*, Washington 1990.

²² For example, Aquinas, *In Quatuor Libros Sententiarum*, vol. 1 (of 8), *S. Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia*, ed. R. Busa, Stuttgart - Bad Cannstatt 1980, lib. 3, dist. 5, quest. 3, art. 2, p. 282. For a list of references see Aquin, *L'Unité de l'intellect*, 208, note 23.

and they are equally as important in forming his philosophical positions as in shaping his theological doctrines. One of their authors, the Pseudo-Dionysius, he regarded as quasi-Apostolic. Thomas wrote a commentary on his *De Divinis Nominibus* which is our most important source for his knowledge and judgment of Platonism until the works which follow his reading of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*.²³ But, as we shall see below, the pervasive Platonism of the Dionysian *corpus* was hidden to Aquinas for some time. Because of purposes which remain unknown to us, Dionysius not only hid his identity but also obscured his relation to Platonism. In consequence, Thomas had little control over how the Neoplatonism Dionysius authoritatively conveyed affected him.²⁴ Boethius, like Augustine, speaks of Platonism and places himself within its tradition but, in contrast to Augustine, never criticises it, attempting, like his pagan contemporaries (and like Dionysius?), to preserve the Hellenic tradition against the descent into barbarism.²⁵

(b) Pagan Platonists

The pagan Platonists also teach him directly. First, there is the Latin Macrobius, "a Neoplatonist in the fullest sense of the word",²⁶ whose *In Somnium Scipionis* is with Thomas from the beginning. He is one of the bee-like - Macrobius himself used the image - compilers so common among the Platonists of late Antiquity, and is most important as a source for earlier thinkers. His judgment of *Plotinus, inter philosophiae professores cum Platone princeps*, Thomas quotes in a *sed contra* of the *Summa Theologiae* to give authority to his own position on how to structure the virtues.²⁷ Although on this basis he ascribes what is his own position to Plotinus, the text he uses is, in fact, from Porphyry.²⁸

Macrobius and Augustine work together to give Aquinas his picture of the role of the Platonists in the movement of the Ideas into the divine intellect. The Platonists have a positive influence on the formation of his own teaching in the *Summa Theologiae*.²⁹ But they have a negative one as well. In Thomas' judgment, the logic of their position keeps the Ideas outside the First (so as not to compromise its simplicity) and thus helps spawn Arianism. Thomas knew enough of Origen to judge that his heresies derived from his Platonism.³⁰ Thomas is clear in his early *Super Boetium De Trinitate* (1257-1259) that, for the

²³ Here J. Durantel, *Saint Thomas et le Pseudo-Denis*, Paris 1919, with its catalogue of 1,700 citations of the pseudo-Dionysius (a number unsurpassed by any other author), remains a classic.

²⁴ See W.J. Hankey, 'Dionysian Hierarchy in St. Thomas Aquinas: Tradition and Transformation', *Denys l'Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident, Actes du Colloque International Paris, 21-24 septembre 1994*, ed. Ysabel de Andia, Paris 1997 (Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 151), 405-438.

²⁵ See Hankey, 'Denys and Aquinas', 162-164 and R.D. Crouse, 'Semina Rationum: St. Augustine and Boethius', *Dionysius* 4 (1980), 75-85.

²⁶ S. Gersh, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism: The Latin Tradition*, 2 vol., Notre Dame, Indiana 1986 (Notre Dame Studies in medieval studies 23), ii, 493.

²⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, pars 2-1, quest. 61, art. 5, *sed contra*; see J.P. Hochschild, 'Porphyry, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas: A Neoplatonic Hierarchy of Virtues and Two Christian Appropriations', *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism and Christianity*, ed. J. Inglis, Richmond [England]: Curzon Press, Chapter Fourteen, in press.

²⁸ For what Thomas cites as being in fact from Porphyry's *Sententiae ad intelligibilia ducentes*, see Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. W.H. Stahl, New York 1952 (Columbia University Press: Records of Civilization, Sources and Studies 48), p. 121, note 3 and Gersh, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism*, ii, pp. 508-509, note 91.

²⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, pars 1, quest. 15, especially art. 1, ad 2 and art. 3; see Hankey, *God in Himself*, 100-102 and V. Boland, *Ideas in God According to Saint Thomas Aquinas. Sources and Synthesis*, Leiden 1996 (Brill Studies in the History of Christian Thought 69).

³⁰ For example, Aquinas finds that the heretical Origen *in pluribus Platoniorum opinionem sectatur*, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Potentia*, ed. P.M. Pession, *Quaestiones Disputatae*, 2 vols. Turin/ Rome 1965, quest. 6, art. 6, ad 2,

Platonists, the divine mind, or intellect, is *quandam inferiorem substantiam ... plenam omnium rerum ydeas* and that this subordination requires that they posit *tres primas et principales*.³¹ The Platonists might on this account be regarded as having taught a version of the Trinity. Aquinas rejects this, however, as both impossible in principle -- because for him the Trinity cannot be discovered by philosophy -- and erroneous in fact. It is characteristic of Macrobius to set Plato and Aristotle against one another for the sake of showing Plato's superiority, but this is not at all the strategy of Simplicius, the most determined of the harmonizers.³²

The few commentaries of Simplicius known to Thomas are prized and richly used in the last decade of his writing, and we must say more about Thomas' following of him below. Once again, late in Thomas' life, there is the teacher of Simplicius, Ammonius, whose commentary on the *Peri Hermeneias* (translated by Moerbeke in 1268),³³ together with the second commentary of Boethius (who was also dependent upon but probably not a student of Ammonius) on the same book, underlie his unfinished *Expositio Libri Peryermenias* (1270-1271). Both Ammonius and Boethius supply rich treasuries for knowledge of their predecessors in the tradition.³⁴ The *Elements of Theology* of Proclus, directly known only in Thomas' last years, is deeply studied and used with remarkable insight. Porphyry is known both directly and through others, especially, of course Augustine. As we have seen Porphyry and Plotinus are sometimes confused. Nonetheless, Plotinus and Cicero, served both Augustine and Thomas as a sources of Platonism.³⁵ They are known about and cited by name.

(c) *Christian Platonists*

The Latin Christian, Calcidius, the character of whose Platonism is disputed,³⁶ is another gatherer and preserver, and is quoted and cited by name. However, as with Plotinus and Cicero, Thomas probably did not read his work directly. The partial translation and commentary of Calcidius on the *Timaeus* was very widely read in the Latin Middle Ages and excerpts from it seem to be the principal sources for Thomas' knowledge of the dialogue. Simplicius and Alexander of Aphrodisias are others. At the end of his life Thomas certainly had William of Moerbeke's translation of the Simplicius commentary on the *De Caelo* which

vol. 2, p. 176 and he judges that Origen's insistence on the Platonic position made him the font of Arianism, idem, *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Rome / Paris 1992 (Commissio Leonina: *Opera Omnia Sancti Thomae de Aquino* vol. 50), quest. 3, art. 4, resp., p. 116, lines 124-124 See also idem, *De Substantiis Separatis*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Rome 1968 (Commissio Leonina: *Opera Omnia Sancti Thomae de Aquino*, vol. 40, pars D), cap. 12.

³¹ Aquinas, *Super de Trinitate*, quest. 3, art. 4, resp., p. 115, line 110-p. 116, line 123. Also *ibid.*, quest. 1, art. 4, ad 8, p. 90, line 163-p.91, line 183; idem, *Summa Theologiae*, pars 1, quest. 32, art. 1, resp.; idem, *De Potentia*, quest. 6, art. 6, resp C, vol. 2, p. 174 and see V. Boland, *Ideas in God*, 26-28.

³² See R. Sorabji, 'General Introduction', in Philoponus, *Against Aristotle, on the Eternity of the World*, ed. C. Wildberg, London 1987 (The Ancient Commentators on Aristotle), 8.

³³ Ammonius, *Commentaire sur le Peri Hermeneias d'Aristote. Traduction de Guillaume de Moerbeke*, édition critique et étude sur l'utilisation du Commentaire dans l'oeuvre de saint Thomas par G. Verbeke, Louvain/Paris 1961 (Corpus Latinum Commentariorum in Aristotelem Graecorum 2).

³⁴ R.-A. Gauthier in Aquinas, *Expositio Libri Peryermenias*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Editio altera retractata: Rome 1989 (Commissio Leonina: *Opera Omnia Sancti Thomae de Aquino*, vol. 1, pars 1), 81*-88*.

³⁵ E.g., Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, pars 2-2, quest. 145, art. 2, ad 1 quotes "Tullio in 1 De Officiis" on Plato, the *Rhetoric* is quoted in the same question. From Macrobius he could also learn to regard Cicero as a Platonist, see Macrobius, *Commentarium in Somnium Scipionis*, ed. J. Willis, 2nd ed. Stuttgart / Leiden 1994 (Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana), lib. 1, cap. 8.5, p. 37 and lib. 2, cap. 2.21, p. 103.

³⁶ He is as classified a Middle Platonist by J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, Ithaca 1977, 401-408 and as a Neoplatonist in Gersh, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism*, i, 48-49.

refers to the *Timaeus* often. The late date, 1272-1273, of his own exposition of Aristotle's *De Caelo* is determined by Moerbeke's translation, finished in 1271, on which it depends heavily.³⁷ The source for Thomas' equally late references to Plato in *Tymeo* in his *Sententia Libri De Sensu et Sensato* seems to be Moerbeke's translation of the commentary of Alexander of Aphrodisias.³⁸

Considering the sources of Thomas' knowledge of the *Timaeus* brings us to a very complex question on which we can only touch, and leads us to another late Antique Christian Neoplatonist, John Philoponus. In his *Exposition of Aristotle's books De Caelo et Mundo*, Aquinas discerns a doctrine of creation in the *Timaeus*: the heaven is *factum de novo* although it will endure forever (*sempiterno tempore*) through another. He specifies a little further on more exactly what he takes as Plato's teaching: "The world is generated and corruptible in itself, but will always remain because of God's will" (*Mundus est genitus et corruptibilis secundum seipsum, sed semper manebit propter voluntatem Dei*).³⁹ This understanding of the *Timaeus* by Aquinas is a refinement of his view that Aristotle and Plato teach, in contradistinction from the *Naturales* who preceded them, that there is a single divine cause of *esse*.

In *De Substantiis Separatis* Thomas tells us: *Secundum sententiam Platonis et Aristotilis*, it is necessary to posit another higher cause.

It is necessary, therefore, beyond the mode of coming to be, by which something becomes by the coming of form to matter [this doctrine he ascribed to the *Naturales*], to presuppose another origin of things, according as *esse* is bestowed on the whole universe of things (*toti universitati rerum*) by a first being which is its own being (*a primo ente quod est suum esse*).⁴⁰

Further on in the same chapter Thomas is completely explicit. It ought not to be thought, he says, because Plato and Aristotle held that immaterial substances and the heavenly bodies always existed, that "they denied to them a cause of their being" (*causam essendi*). They did not deviate from the Catholic faith by positing *increata*.⁴¹

That Thomas understands Aristotle to teach this is generally recognised (though much puzzled about).⁴² In fact, many of the same places alleged by scholars to support this interpretation apply to Plato as well as to Aristotle.⁴³ Recently, Mark Johnson has

³⁷ For Calcidius in *Commento super Tymeo* see, e.g. Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Malo*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Rome / Paris 1982 (Commissio Leonina: *Opera Omnia Sancti Thomae de Aquino*, vol. 23), quest. 16, art. 1, obj 8, p. 280, lines 85-87, the quotation from the *Timaeus* at *Summa Theologiae*, pars 1, quest. 50, art. 5, obj. 2 and summarized in *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, art. 1, ad 8, p. 5 is probably from his commentary. For Simplicius see Aquinas, *In Aristotelis Libros De Caelo et Mundo Expositio*, ed. R.M. Spiazzi, Turin/ Rome 1952, lib. 2, lect. 1, sect. 291 and 297-298 and Bossier, "Traductions latines et influences du *Commentaire In de Caelo*."

³⁸ See Aquinas, *Sententia Libri De Sensu et Sensato*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Rome / Paris 1985 (Commissio Leonina: *Opera Omnia Sancti Thomae de Aquino* vol. 45, pars 2), tract. 1, cap. 2, p. 19, lines 184 and 195.

³⁹ Aquinas, *In De Caelo*, lib. 1, lect. 23, sect. 236, p. 113 and lib. 1, lect. 29, sect. 283, p. 138; see lib. 1, lect. 6, p. 30, sect. 61; lib. 1, lect. 21, p. 108, sect. 227; lib. 1, lect. 29, sect. 277.

⁴⁰ Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 9, p. D 57, lines 103-118.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, cap. 9, p. D 58, lines 215-220.

⁴² L. Dewan, 'St. Thomas, Aristotle, and Creation', *Dionysius* 15 (1991), 81-90; M.F. Johnson, 'Did St. Thomas Attribute a Doctrine of Creation to Aristotle', *New Scholasticism* 63 (1989), 129-155.

⁴³ Of the list in *Aquinas on Creation*, trans. S.E. Balder and W.E. Carroll, Toronto 1997 (Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies: Mediaeval Sources in Translation 35), p. 128, note 20, this applies at least to *De Potentia*, quest. 3, art. 5; *In Octo Libros Physicorum Aristotelis Expositio*, cap. 8, art. 2 where, as in the *Summa Theologiae* he speaks of creation as *emanatio*, the *De Substantiis Separatis* and the *In De Caelo*.

convincingly shown that Thomas changed his view on Plato in this regard.⁴⁴ In his earlier writings, Thomas had held that matter was uncaused for Plato. He accepted an opinion of Peter Lombard that for Plato there were *tria initia*, namely: exemplars, God as artificer, and matter. He supposed, in consequence, that Plato thought there was no idea of matter, rather it was *concausa*.⁴⁵ The turning point is in the *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia* (1265-1266) and it is decisive. Indeed, in the passage from the very late *De Substantiis Separatis* quoted just above, the doctrine that God is the solitary cause of being for all things is stated in a form which sounds more Platonic than Aristotelian. Thomas speaks there of the First Principle as *simplicissimum* and argues that “because subsistent being (*esse subsistens*) must be one ... it is necessary that all other things which are under it exist in the way they do as participants in *esse* (*omnia alia quae sub ipso sunt sic esse quasi esse participantia*).”⁴⁶ His *Exposition of the Liber de causis* shows that, having looked at Plato more and more in Neoplatonic terms, Thomas saw that for Platonists all is derived from one exalted First Principle. Even if the Platonists “posited many gods ordered under one” rather than as we do “positing one only having all things in itself”, everyone agrees “universality of causality belongs to God” (*universalitas .. causalitatis propria est Deo*).⁴⁷

We come by this route to John Philoponus as a source of Thomas’ understanding of Plato. The notion that Aristotle taught a doctrine of creation was developed among the late Antique Neoplatonic and Peripatetic conciliators of Plato and Aristotle who prepare the way for, are presupposed by, and oppose the arguments of Philoponus against the eternity of the world. The Platonist conciliators want to draw together the pagan *Genesis*, the *Timaeus*,⁴⁸ and its ‘Demiurge’ with Aristotle’s *Physics* and his Unmoved Mover. To do this they must find some way of reconciling Aristotle’s eternal universe with that in the *Timaeus* which is, as Aquinas discerned, generated and corruptible, though perpetual because it is held in being by the divine will.⁴⁹ The efforts and diverse positions of Alexander of Aphrodisias, Ammonius, Simplicius, Boethius, Proclus (to name only those whose texts and positions on this question are known in some measure to Aquinas) give the background to the pervasive notion in late Antiquity and the Middle Ages that Aristotle and Plato regarded the First Principle as a creator. These thinkers and their positions stand behind what in *Ioannes Grammaticus* interested Aquinas.

Richard Sorabji judges that John Philoponus is at the root of some of Thomas’ arguments against the eternity of the world (we note though that Sorabji’s argument depends in part on the “Alexander” of the 8th book of Thomas’ commentary on the *Physics* being, in truth, Philoponus).⁵⁰ At the beginning of his *In De Caelo et Mundo*, Aquinas tells us that *Ioannes Grammaticus, qui dictus est Philoponus*, argues *auctoritate Platonis*, and teaches that “the

⁴⁴ M.F. Johnson. ‘Aquinas’ Changing Evaluation of Plato on Creation’, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 66:1 (1992), 81-88.

⁴⁵ Aquinas, *In Sententiarum*, lib. 2, dist. 1, expositio textus, p. 122 and *Summa Theologiae*, pars 1, quest. 15, art. 3, ad 2.

⁴⁶ Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 9, p. D 57, lines 103-110.

⁴⁷ Aquinas, *Super De causis*, prop. 19, p. 106, lines 13-17.

⁴⁸ See P. Hadot, ‘Physique et poésie dans le *Timée* de Platon’, in idem, *Études de philosophie ancienne*, Paris 1998 (Les Belles Lettres: L’ane d’or), 277.

⁴⁹ See R. Sorabji, ‘Infinite power impressed: the transformation of Aristotle’s physics and theology’, K. Verrycken, ‘The metaphysics of Ammonius son of Hermias’, and idem, ‘The development of Philoponus’ thought and its chronology’, in *Aristotle Transformed. The Ancient Commentators and their Influence*, ed. R. Sorabji, Ithaca 1990, 181-198; 199-231; 233-274, respectively.

⁵⁰ See R. Sorabji in Philoponus, *Against Aristotle, on the Eternity of the World*, 21 and idem, ‘Infinite power impressed’, 191-198.

heavenly body is generable and corruptible” *secundum suam naturam*.⁵¹ Because of a number of different confusions in the sources of Thomas information about Philoponus, which add to the problems caused by the radical changes in Philoponus’ own teaching, Aquinas does not have an altogether accurate picture of the doctrine of Philoponus (or of Alexander).

William of Moerbeke had translated and left fragments of the commentary of Philoponus on the *De Anima* in the margins of his translation of the paraphrastic commentary of Themistius. From there they seem to have become known to Aquinas and figure in his own exposition of the *Peri Psyche*.⁵² In December of 1268 William finished translating Philoponus on the *De Anima*.⁵³ As a result it is possible that Aquinas did read yet another translation by Moerbeke of a late antique Neoplatonist commentary on Aristotle.⁵⁴ However, the translated commentary, in fact, shows Philoponus as a faithful Alexandrian Neoplatonist, reproducing the standard doctrines of the school and, on the matters of most concern to Thomas as a Christian what he read would have given him no support.⁵⁵

In any case, Philoponus is named by Aquinas in his very late *Expositio Libri Peryermeias* as well as *On the De Caelo et Mundo* (begun about the same time). In the latter, as I noted, he appears as a proponent of the generation of the heavens. This is the aspect of Philoponus which may be at the origin of some of Thomas’ arguments supporting a temporal beginning of creation. Several sources for this side of Philoponus are possible. There are Simplicius and Boethius. The most likely, however, is the Arabic tradition --Al farabi, Averroes, Avicenna, and Moses Maimonides. In it Philoponus shows himself as a Christian and his arguments serve what is taken as the Biblical notion of the *creatio ex nihilo* which requires that the world not be eternal.⁵⁶

(d) *Peripatetics, the Arabic traditions and fellow mediaeval Christians*

Those who might be called Peripatetics convey much which belongs to the common Platonism of late Antiquity.⁵⁷ There is the very important Themistius, whose paraphrastic commentary on the *De Anima* Thomas was the first mediaeval Latin to study and use deeply.⁵⁸ Towards the end of his writing, Thomas knows directly at least one of the commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias, that on the *De Sensu*, translated around 1260 by Moerbeke but neglected by Thomas until 1268. R.-A. Gauthier finds Alexander mentioned

⁵¹ Aquinas, *In De Caelo*, lib. 1, lect. 6, sect. 60, p. 29.

⁵² See R.-A. Gauthier in Aquinas, *Sententia libri De Anima*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Rome / Paris 1984 (Commissio Leonina: *Opera Omnia Sancti Thomae de Aquino* vol. 45, 1), 274*.

⁵³ Jean Philopon, *Commentaire sur le De Anima d’Aristote*. Traduction de traduction de Guillaume de Moerbeke, ed. G. Verbeke, Louvain/Paris 1966 (Corpus Latinum Commentariorum in Aristotelem Graecorum 3) and see the argument of R.-A. Gauthier in Aquinas, *Sententia Libri De Sensu*, 102*, note 7.

⁵⁴ Aquinas, *Expositio Libri Peryermeias*, 83* and lib. 1, cap. 6, p. 34, lines 85-91.

⁵⁵ Verbeke, in Philopon, *Commentaire sur le De Anima*, xii-lxxxvi.

⁵⁶ On Philoponus as source of the Arabic arguments against the eternity of the world see H. A. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy*, Oxford 1987 and P. Lettinck, *Aristotle’s Physics and its Reception in the Arabic World*, Leiden 1994 (Brill Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus 7), 5-6, 17-18, 235-236, 337.

⁵⁷ H.J. Blumental, ‘Neoplatonic elements in the *de Anima* commentaries’, *Aristotle Transformed. The Ancient Commentators and their Influence*, ed. R. Sorabji, Ithaca 1990, 305-324.

⁵⁸ See Themistius, *Commentaire sur le Traité de l’âme d’Aristote*, traduction de Guillaume de Moerbeke, édition critique et étude sur l’utilisation du Commentaire dans l’oeuvre de saint Thomas par G. Verbeke, Louvain/Paris 1957 (Corpus Latinum Commentariorum in Aristotelem Graecorum 1) and de Libera in Aquin, *L’Unité de l’intellect*, 48, note 1. Thomas has a lot of sources for Themistius, one is Averroes. Thus, in the same work he is using this Themistius commentary and Averroes quoting him: see Aquinas, *De Malo*, quest. 3, art. 3, obj 10, p. 71, lines 61-64 and quest. 16, art. 12, ad 1, p. 333, lines 151-153.

by Aquinas 94 times in his works as a whole.⁵⁹ For the sometimes confused information behind most of these citations Thomas' sources are indirect: primarily it comes through Averroes and through Simplicius *On the Categories* and *On the De Caelo*. In both cases, however, the medium conveyed enough that Aquinas was able to use Alexander to refute Averroes, on the unicity of the intellect,⁶⁰ and Simplicius on the subject of Aristotle's *De Caelo et Mundo*, respectively!⁶¹ Albert the Great and Bonaventure are also important media of knowledge of Alexander, but Aquinas corrects his great Franciscan rival, Bonaventure, for confusing Alexander of Aphrodisias with his own brother in the O.F.M., Alexander of Hales!⁶² Finally, perhaps in his *Sententia libri De Anima*,⁶³ but certainly in his *Sententia Libri De Sensu* (which Gauthier dates between 1268 and 1270) where he follows Alexander step by step, Thomas is working under the direct tutelage of Alexander's own text.⁶⁴

Thomas knows enough about the difference between the Peripatetic and the Platonic commentators to discern the differences between their styles, as indeed between the styles of those they follow. Aristotle is a literalist, Plato speaks like the *Theologi* who *res divinas poetice et fabulariter tradiderunt*.⁶⁵ "He says everything figuratively and teaches through symbols, intending something other through his words than what they themselves say." Aristotle argues against the literal sense of the words (*secundum quod verba sonant*) not rejecting Plato's arguments "in respect to Plato's intention (*intentionem*), but with respect to the literal sense of his words (*sonum verborum eius*)".⁶⁶

Some of the interpreters, Simplicius in particular,⁶⁷ say that *isti poetae et philosophi, et praecipue Plato* ought not to be understood *secundum quod sonat secundum superficiem verborum*, but in accord with the wisdom (*sapientia*) which these writers wished to hide under stories and enigmatic speech (*fabulis et aenigmaticis locutionibus*). Such interpreters maintain that usually Aristotle was not objecting to Plato's understanding *qui erat sanus, sed contra verba eorum*.⁶⁸ In contrast, Alexander's approach was like Aristotle's. He wished that *Plato et alii antiqui philosophi* be understood *quod verba eorum exterius sonant*. In consequence, Alexander supposed that Aristotle was trying to argue *non solum contra verba, sed contra intellectum eorum*. Following Aristotle and Simplicius on his text, Thomas judges, however, that we ought not to be too concerned with this difference. The study of philosophy is not about what humans might perceive (*quid homines senserint*), but how the truth of things would actually have it (*qualiter se habeat veritas rerum*)!⁶⁹ Aquinas may be aware of hermeneutical traditions, but he does not place himself within them.

Nonetheless, pseudo-Aristotelian works coming from the Arabs (above all the *Liber*

⁵⁹ R.-A. Gauthier in Aquinas, *Sententia Libri De Sensu*, 96* (if Sorabji is right in 'Infinite power impressed', 191, 8 of these mentions belong in fact to John Philoponus).

⁶⁰ See Aquin, *L'Unité de l'intellect*, cap. 2, sect. 55, p. 130 and notes especially 48, note 2.

⁶¹ Aquinas, *In De Caelo*, proem. 4-5, pp. 2-3.

⁶² R.-A. Gauthier in Aquinas, *Sententia Libri De Sensu*, 98*.

⁶³ See R.-A. Gauthier's apparatus at Aquinas, *Sententia libri De Anima*, lib. 2, cap. 14, line 145, p. 125.

⁶⁴ R.-A. Gauthier in Aquinas, *Sententia Libri De Sensu*, 103* and 128*.

⁶⁵ Aquinas, *In De Caelo*, lib. 1, lect. 22, sect. 227, p. 108.

⁶⁶ Aquinas, *Sententia libri De Anima*, lib. 1, cap. 8, p. 38, lines 3-22.

⁶⁷ On Simplicius as the source of these judgments by Aquinas see F. Bossier, "Traductions latines et influences du *Commentaire In de Caelo* en Occident (XIIIe-XIVe s.)," *Simplicius sa vie, son oeuvre, sa survie. Actes du colloque international de Paris (28 Sept.-1er Oct. 1985)*, ed. I. Hadot. Berlin & London 1987 (de Gruyter: Peripatoi 15), 301-308.

⁶⁸ Aquinas, *In De Caelo*, lib. 1, lect. 22, sect. 228, p. 109.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* See also lib. 1, lect. 23, sect. 233.

de Causis)⁷⁰; Arabic commentaries and philosophical - theological syntheses, especially of Alfarabi, Averroes and Avicenna, place Thomas in what is for his thought a critically important tradition of interpretation. From the beginning of his studies the Arabic works place his view of Aristotle within the context of the commentaries of Late Antiquity with their predominantly Neoplatonic mentality. Alain de Libera characterizes this *péripatétisme arabe* so as to show how Aristotle now conveys Platonism:

*Il n'y a plus à concilier Aristote et Platon, car Aristote lui-même a absorbé le platonisme, non plus certes le platonisme de Platon, mais celui du Plotinus Arabus et du Proclus Arabus. Le fruit de cette improbable assimilation est le péripatétisme arab.*⁷¹

Moses Maimonides lies within this Arabic tradition and Thomas finds him to be *cum Platone concordans*, though in this concord he may also *Aristotelis sententiam sequens*.⁷²

Finally, Christian medievals provide information as well as another group of hermeneutical approaches.⁷³ Who they are and what they convey is too complex a question for more than a few suggestions here. Even the condemned Eriugena, under cover of the *corpus dionysicum* and by report,⁷⁴ plays a role, as does John Damascene. Mediaeval glosses (e.g. Abelard, whose *Glosse super Peryermenias* may be a vehicle for Porphyry⁷⁵), commentaries, and paraphrases (e.g. those of Robert Grosseteste and Albert convey to Aquinas Gerard of Cremona's translation of the paraphrase of Themistius on the *Posterior Analytics*)⁷⁶, and the notes of William of Moerbeke, transmitted more than we can calculate. Other mediaeval teachers are sources, especially those like Peter Lombard and Alexander of Hales who determined the *genres* of mediaeval theology and the approaches to its texts. The most important of these mediaeval masters is his own teacher, Albert the Great, at whose feet Thomas was initiated into the Neoplatonic mysteries of the Pseudo-Dionysian *corpus*.⁷⁷ Alain de Libera judges that Albert's "syncretistic" Neoplatonism, "which corrects Plato by Aristotle and completes Aristotle with Plato" fundamentally in reflection on the Arab tradition, enables the reception of "Peripatetic philosophy into the Christian, Platonist tradition".⁷⁸ Finally, there is Thomas' Franciscan contemporary, Bonaventure. Their

⁷⁰ On his indirect but important knowledge of the so-called *Theology of Aristotle* see Richard C. Taylor, 'Aquinas, the *Plotiniana Arabica*, and the Metaphysics of Being and Actuality', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59 (1998), 217-239.

⁷¹ A. de Libera, *La querelle des universaux: De Platon à la fin du Moyen Age*, Paris 1996 (Des travaux), 117 and see pp. 68-124.

⁷² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, pars 1, quest. 66, art. 1, ad 2 and idem, *De Potentia*, quest. 4, art. 1, ad 2, vol. 2, p. 105.

⁷³ The widest and most optimistic estimation of his médiéval sources is found in the introduction by R.-A. Gauthier to Aquinas, *Sententia libri De Anima*, 201*-282*. See de Libera in Aquin, *L'Unité de l'intellect*, 48, note 2 for a criticism of one of the judgments of the editors.

⁷⁴ See Aquinas, *Super Epistolam ad Hebraeos Lectura, Super Epistolas S. Pauli Lectura*, ed. R. Cai, 8th ed. 2. vols. Turin/ Rome 1953, vol. 2, p. 354, sect. 85; É.-H. Wéber, *Dialogue et dissensions entre saint Bonaventure et saint Thomas d'Aquin à Paris (1252-1273)*, Paris 1974 (Bibliothèque thomiste 41), 460-484; Hankey, *God in Himself*, 33-34; 55, note 74; idem, 'Aquinas, Pseudo-Denys, Proclus and Isaiah', 74 and H.F. Dondaine, *Le Corpus dionysien de l'Université de Paris au xiiiè siècle*, Rome 1953 (Edizione di Storia e Letteratura) and E. C. Sweeney, 'Three notions of *resolutio* and the Structure of Reasoning in Aquinas', *The Thomist* 58:2 (1994), 203-204, 215-228.

⁷⁵ See Gauthier in Aquinas, *Expositio Libri Peryermenias*, 64*-65*.

⁷⁶ See Gauthier in Aquinas, *Expositio Libri Posteriorum*, 55*-59*.

⁷⁷ See Hankey, 'Dionysian Hierarchy in St. Thomas Aquinas', 420, note 32.

⁷⁸ de Libera, *La querelle*, 245-262 at 257 and to somewhat the same effect E. Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology in Islamic and Christian Thinkers*, Cambridge 1983, (Cambridge Studies in medieval life and thought III, 20), 163-

“dialogue and disagreements” involve different ways of uniting Aristotle, Dionysius, and Augustine and many exchanges of perspectives and information.⁷⁹

This vast expanse of sources was always growing, especially during Thomas’ last years when, in light of his new and more accurate knowledge of the history of philosophy, he returns to formal *lectio* on the works of Aristotle. However, while the extent and detail, the accuracy and subtlety, of his knowledge expands, while the Neoplatonic penetration of his own thought deepens, and while his hermeneutical perspective comes more under its influence, his consciousness was not of a kind which takes explicit account of changes in its own mentality. Thomas was not much concerned about what *homines senserint*.⁸⁰ He seems not to be aware of the degree to which his criticism of Platonism takes place within its tradition.

4. Supplementing Henle

Comparably, defects with Henle’s work stem from having too much absorbed the ahistorical metaphysical mentality of his subject as well as the negative attitude to Platonism in the Gilsonian *studium* from which his book emerged as a doctoral thesis.⁸¹ Missing from Henle’s book is a sufficiently accurate time-line for the works of Aquinas and the relation of the works to the sequence of Thomas’ sources of the Platonic tradition as they became available to him in the Thirteenth century.⁸² Henle fails to use Saffrey’s edition of the exposition of the *Liber de Causis*. This lack is important because this is Aquinas’ most informed commentary on a Neoplatonic text and Saffrey’s was the first fully scientific edition of any of Thomas’ works, certainly the first using the new scholarly knowledge of the history of post-Plotinian Neoplatonism. Thus, Henle incorrectly makes Proclus’ *Elements of Theology* a source for Thomas’ knowledge of Platonism in the commentary on the *Divine Names*, which the scholarly consensus now dates between 1265 and 1268, before he had the text of the *Elements*.⁸³ Nonetheless, whatever the circumstances or decisions which prevented Henle’s use of Saffrey, far more important for deficiencies in Henle’s analysis of Thomas’ sources is something over which he had no control. As I just noted, Saffrey’s edition represented a new beginning in editing Thomas’ texts. Since then the editions produced by the Leonine editors have been of an altogether new and outstanding quality.⁸⁴

267 with the contrast between “Albertus Magnus: A logico-emanationist figure as a means of accepting Peripatetic philosophy into the Christian, Platonist tradition” and “Thomas Aquinas: the ‘Aufhebung’ of Radical Aristotelian ontology into a PseudoDionysian-Proclean ontology of ‘esse’”.

⁷⁹ See Wéber, *Dialogue et dissensions entre saint Bonaventure et saint Thomas d’Aquin*. For differences in their hermeneutics see Hankey, “Magis... Pro Nostra Sentencia”: John Wyclif, his mediaeval Predecessors and reformed Successors, and a pseudo-Augustinian Eucharistic Decretal’, *Augustiniana* 45 (1995), 235-239.

⁸⁰ Aquinas, *In De Caelo*, lib. 1, lect. 22, sect. 228, p. 109.

⁸¹ It was written for the University of Toronto during the ascendancy of Gilsonian Thomism there. For Henle’s relation to that see W.J. Hankey, ‘From Metaphysics to History, from Exodus to Neoplatonism, from Scholasticism to Pluralism: the fate of Gilsonian Thomism in English-speaking North America’, *Dionysius* 16 (1998), 164, note 27, 172, note 48.

⁸² In general I rely on the dating given in G. Emery, ‘Bref catalogue des oeuvres de saint Thomas’ in Torrell, *Initiation à saint Thomas d’Aquin*, 483-525. I have supplemented this with information from Louis-Jacques Bataillon, whom I thank, and from the various critical editions consulted, especially the recent productions of the *Commissio Leonina*.

⁸³ Henle, *Saint Thomas*, 176-183.

⁸⁴ On the deficiencies with the earlier work of the *Commissio Leonina* see L.J. Bataillon, ‘Le edizioni di *Opera Omnia* degli scolastici e l’Edizione Leonina,’ *Gli studi di filosofia medievale fra Otto e Novecento. Contributo a un bilancio storiografico. Atti del convegno internazionale Roma, 21-23 settembre 1989*, ed. R. Imbach and A. Maierù, Rome 1991, (Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura), 141-54; idem, ‘La Commission Léonine pour l’édition des oeuvres de s.

They have provided me with information about Thomas' sources unavailable to Father Henle. This essay is deeply indebted to him, to them and to Father Saffrey. However, in judging the result, we must remember that the greatest works of Aquinas still await proper critical editions. Without accurate identification and analysis of his use of sources in the *Sentences* commentary, the great *Summae* and the last commentaries on Aristotle, the work Henle undertook cannot be completed.

Henle's work has another deficiency. He failed to appreciate the extent to which Thomas' assessment of Platonism takes place from within it. Thomas adopts presentations of the history of philosophy -- and of the relative places within it of Plato and Aristotle -- from Neoplatonists like Macrobius, Ammonius, Themistius, Simplicius and their successors. The positions from which he criticises Platonic arguments and doctrines are often themselves Neoplatonic, and he thinks from within a fundamentally Neoplatonic framework. Like his predecessors in that tradition, it was while regarding Plotinus as a great commentator on the Philosopher, that Thomas endeavoured careful exposition of Aristotle's works. For most of his life, he received Neoplatonic works as Aristotle's. For all of it, he looked at Aristotle through the tradition of Neoplatonic commentary, and under its influence Thomas read Platonic positions into his texts. Because Aquinas is an unreliable guide to his own relation to Platonism, what we can discover lexicographically is severely limited. Henle's work notes some aspects of the Neoplatonic context with which Thomas treats Platonism, but this needs large supplement and fundamental modification.⁸⁵

Henle's analysis of how Thomas represents Plato and the *Platonici* remains substantially correct and it will form the foundation of much of what follows. Happily, many scholars before, and especially since, the publication of *Saint Thomas and Platonism* have made contributions to the enormous and difficult task of placing Thomas' teaching within the history of Platonism. I shall use their work to supplement Henle's lexicographic construction of Thomas' own understanding of Platonism. I shall try to show in relation to a few important points in Thomas' representation of Platonism in what way his perspective, and the position from which he criticises Plato, is in fact Platonic.

5. Characterizing Platonism

What Aquinas represents as Platonism is an ahistorical deduction within a simplified and schematized history of ancient philosophy in the first place dependent upon Aristotle.⁸⁶ Thomas' polemical reconstruction privileges Aristotle's representation of Plato's teaching in the first book of the *Metaphysics*.⁸⁷ The aim of Aristotle's criticism is to show how Plato's philosophy leads to his own position. To that end Aristotle uses against Plato criticisms already found in the later dialogues of his teacher. He thus anticipates Aquinas' use of one aspect of the Platonic tradition against another.

Henle convincingly establishes the pattern for Thomas' treatment of the Platonism he opposes. When Thomas is dealing with philosophical reasoning, he distinguishes the arguments from their conclusions. The most notorious example of this is the *quinque viae* of

Thomas d'Aquin'. *Analecta sacri Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum* 91 (1983), 72-83; idem, 'L'édition léonine des oeuvres de Saint Thomas et les études médiévales', *Atti dell'VIII Congresso Tomistico Internazionale* Vatican City, 1981 (Studi tomistici 10), 452-64.

⁸⁵ On how this correction has taken place recently see G. Ventimiglia, *Differenza e contraddizione. Il problema dell'essere in Tommaso d'Aquino: esse, diversum, contradictio*, Milano 1997 (Metafisica e storia della metafisica 17).

⁸⁶ Jordan, *Ordering Wisdom*, 186.

⁸⁷ Henle, *Saint Thomas*, 311-312; 362-369; 422-23.

the *Summa Theologiae*.⁸⁸ When he treats the history of philosophy, he similarly distinguishes the arguments of philosophers, which he calls *viae*, and their conclusions, what are established as a result of the arguments; these he calls *positiones*. *Ratio* and *via* are used interchangeably, as are *positio* and *opinio*. Discerning the *viae* makes intelligible the conclusions at which they arrive, just as the *positio* “is commanded and imposed by the *via*”.⁸⁹ This pattern for treating philosophy is well established in the Thomist *corpus* and is frequent in his last, most thorough and best informed treatments of Platonism, those in the exposition of the *Liber de Causis* and in the treatise *On Separate Substances*. In the former, Henle finds it used 24 times.⁹⁰ The first chapters of the latter, which constitute extended treatments of the history of philosophy with lists of differences and agreements between Plato and Aristotle, work on the basis of this structure.⁹¹ However, Aquinas is interested in more than the relation between a particular argument and the conclusion at which it arrives.

A distinct philosophical school is constituted by proceeding according to a characteristic *via*. Henle finds that Thomas may distinguish the opinions of Plato and *alii Platonici*, and he is clear that there are differences within the school, “no text, however, points to a difference in the *via*”.⁹² So we may speak of a distinct *via Platonica* and a *via Aristotelica* as outlined in texts like the following from the last decade of his writing, the *Quaestio disputatae De Spiritualibus Creaturis* (1267-1268). Significantly, we date this work from Thomas’ citation of the commentary on the *Categories* of Aristotle by Simplicius, a book which had just been translated by William of Moerbeke (1266).⁹³ Here, and in the *De Substantiis Separatis*, Aquinas follows Simplicius in characterizing what is proper to the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophic procedures. According to Aquinas and Simplicius, we have a pair of differing arguments which exhaust the possibilities:

The diversity of these two positions stems from this, that some, in order to seek the truth about the nature of things, have proceeded from intelligible reasons, and this was the particular characteristic of the Platonists. Some, however, have proceeded from sensible things, and this was the particular characteristic of the philosophy of Aristotle, as Simplicius says in his commentary *Upon the Categories*.⁹⁴

Henle concludes: “if two philosophies are opposed not only in certain specific arguments and positions but also in characteristically (*proprium*) different approaches to the solution of problems ... they may be distinguished as commonly employing different *viae*.”⁹⁵ The *via*

⁸⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, pars 1, quest. 2, art. 3, resp.

⁸⁹ Henle, *Saint Thomas*, 295.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 183-195 and see Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes* [*Super Librum De Causis Expositio*], translated and annotated by V.A. Guagliardo, C.R. Hess, R.C. Taylor, introduction by V.A. Guagliardo, Washington 1996 (The Catholic University of America Press, Thomas Aquinas in Translation 1), xxiv.

⁹¹ Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 1-4, p. D41-D47.

⁹² Henle, *Saint Thomas*, 447, notes 3 and 4.

⁹³ Simplicius, *Commentaire sur les Catégories d’Aristote*, *Traduction de Guillaume de Moerbeke*, ed. A. Pattin, 2 volumes: vol. 1 Louvain-Paris 1971, vol. 2 Leiden 1975 (Corpus Latinorum commentariorum in Aristotelem Graecorum 1-2). There is a list of citations by Aquinas at vol. 1, xiv.

⁹⁴ Aquinas, *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, art. 3, resp., p. 40-41: *Harum autem duarum opinionum diversitas ex hoc procedit quod quidam, ad inquirendam veritatem de natura rerum, processerunt ex rationibus intelligibilibus, et hoc fuit proprium Platoniorum; quidam vero ex rebus sensibilibus, et hoc fuit proprium philosophiae Aristotelis, ut dicit Simplicius in commento Super praedicamenta*. Aquinas appears to be referring to Simplicius’ *Commentary* at vol. 1, prologus, p. 8, line 70-p. 9, line 85.

⁹⁵ Henle, *Saint Thomas*, 296.

Platoniorum has a distinct *radix* or *principium* or *fundamentum* from which it proceeds according to a proper way to its positions. It begins and proceeds *ex rationibus intelligibilibus*, and thus thinks in terms of the inherent independence of the separate substances. We shall see that, for Thomas, though there are problems with this approach to reality, it was not only a necessary step on the way to Aristotle, but also corrects deficient tendencies in the *via Aristotelica*.

Before going on to look more closely at this *radix*, we must say a word about the context of this mutual characterization of Aristotle and the Platonists as Aquinas inherits it. Not only does this mutual characterization occur within a schematized progressive history set up in terms of simple oppositions, but its assumption is the ultimate reconcilability of the two schools.

6. 'Motionless motion': reconciling Plato and Aristotle

Simplicius, as he makes clear in the *Prooemium* of his *Super praedicamenta* which Aquinas cites,⁹⁶ like another and comparable source of Thomas' Platonism, Boethius, is a determined conciliator of Plato and Aristotle by means of mediating constructions characteristic of Neoplatonism. His opposition of their characteristic procedures takes place within an ultimate reconciliation. One of the means to this is the notion of 'motionless motion' which in this commentary is approached when considering 'making and suffering' (*de facere et pati*) and when treating 'motion' (*de motu*). In both places Simplicius reflects on Aristotle through Plotinus and his followers, especially Iamblichus. Simplicius shows Plotinus trying to dissolve the difference between activity and motion and between rest and motion. In learning, in intellectual life, for what is without parts and what is perfect, these exist together in such a way as to bring together apparently opposed teachings of Plato and Aristotle.⁹⁷ Aquinas, sometimes by way of the Arabic commentators, is an heir of Plotinus, Simplicius, and others like Proclus, who teach this Neoplatonic commonplace.⁹⁸ Thomas does not only use this construction to reconcile the two greatest philosophical authorities, 'motionless motion' is profoundly important for the structure and content of his own thought, including his treatment of the Trinity.

Through his reading of Simplicius, Thomas added to what he had learned about Plotinus from Augustine, Themistius and Macrobius. Simplicius, working as Boethius did in order to preserve the doctrines of his predecessors for the coming barbaric age, quotes them at length in his commentaries. The use Aquinas makes of the information shows that he values it highly. From Simplicius, he judged that this *princeps*, whom he knew from Macrobius, reigned with Plato among philosophers, had an important role in the interpretation of Aristotle. In his *De Unitate Intellectus* (1270), Aquinas, cites the testimony of Simplicius in *Commento Predicamentorum* that "Plotinus, *unus de magnis*, counts among the commentators of Aristotle".⁹⁹ Simplicius, in other writings, explicitly finds in Aristotle himself this 'motion of the perfect' as a characteristic of intellectual life. For example, this

⁹⁶ Simplicius, *Commentaire sur les Catégories*, vol. 1, prologus, p. 10, lines 9-29.

⁹⁷ Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 415-444, especially p. 423 where *Ennead* VI, 1, 15-22 guides the discussion and p. 597, lines 64-71 where Simplicius quotes *Ennead* VI, 3, 27.

⁹⁸ See Stephen Gersh, *KINESIS AKINATOS: A Study of Spiritual Motion in the Philosophy of Proclus* Leiden 1973 (Brill Philosophia Antiqua 26); idem, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena. An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition*, Leiden 1978 (Brill Studien zur Problemgeschichte der Antiken und Mittelalterlichen Philosophie VIII), 67ff., 243ff.

⁹⁹ Aquin, *L'Unité de l'intellect*, cap. 3, sect. 74 (de Libera, 148).

reading is generally found in his commentary on the *Physics*.¹⁰⁰

Averroes seems to be among Thomas' first sources for this conciliating doctrine, though, since there is no evidence that the *Physics' Commentary* of Simplicius was translated into Arabic, Philoponus, who, like Boethius, learned the reconciling strategies from Ammonius, or Themistius may have been his source.¹⁰¹ In Thomas' early *Commentary on the Sentences* and *Upon the De Trinitate of Boethius* (they are both redacted in the second half of the 1250s), he takes up Augustine's use of the *large* sense of motion when it refers to intellectual life, and he explains what Augustine means through Plato as represented by Averroes.¹⁰² In the *Super de Trinitate*, when trying to define theology as a science of the motionless, Thomas has to deal with assertions of self-movement in God by both Augustine and Plato.¹⁰³ In order to find "the way in which it is possible to give truth to" (*modum potest uerificari*) the *dictum Platonis quod dixit quod primus motor mouet se ipsum*, he refers us to what the *Commentator dicit in VIII Phisicorum*. He finds there that if "the activity of the intellect and will is imprecisely called motion" (*improprie operatio intellectus uel uoluntatis motus dicitur*), then someone can be said "to move his own self when he knows or loves himself."¹⁰⁴ And, indeed, Averroes makes the necessary distinctions between motion spoken of univocally and equivocally, between motion of bodies and motion of what is abstract from body.¹⁰⁵

At the beginning of his own commentary on the seventh book of the *Physics*, written a decade later (1268-1269), Aquinas draws on a crucial passage from the third book of the *De Anima* to prove what Simplicius had written long before him: Aristotle and Plato on this matter "do not differ in their judgments (*sententia*) but only in words (*verba*)". Conflating Plato and the Platonists, he makes all the essential points: "The *Platonici* said that nothing corporeal or divisible moves itself." This self-motion belongs to spiritual substance (*substantia spiritualis*) which knows and loves itself. The reconciliation of the two positions depends on calling all operations motions (*universaliter omnes operationes motus appellando*), and distinguishing between imperfect and perfect motions. Thus, it is possible to say both that everything which is moved is moved by another, and that some things move themselves.¹⁰⁶ These Neoplatonic considerations about motion Thomas also reads into Aristotle in a part of the *Summa Theologiae* written at about the same time, and in the earlier *Summa contra Gentiles*, so as reconcile the Philosopher to Plato.

In the *Summa Theologiae*, Plato is represented as teaching that "God moves himself

¹⁰⁰ See Simplicius, *On Aristotle's Physics* 5, translated by J.O. Urmson, notes by P. Lautner, Ithaca, New York 1997 (Cornell University Press The Ancient Commentators on Aristotle), 821, 22, p. 29; 821, 26, p. 29; 824, 14ff.; 824, 2-3, p. 31.

¹⁰¹ Lettinck, *Aristotle's Physics*, 2-3.

¹⁰² Aquinas, *In Sententiarum*, lib. 1, dist. 8, quest. 3, art. 1, ad 2, p. 23 [Super Sent., lib. 1 d. 8 q. 3 a. 1 ad 2 Ad secundum dicendum, quod Augustinus accipit large moveri, secundum quod ipsum intelligere est moveri quoddam et velle, quae proprie non sunt motus sed operationes. In hoc enim verificatur dictum Platonis qui dicit: Deus movet se; sicut dicit Commentator, qui dicit quod Deus intelligit se et vult se: sicut etiam dicimus, quod finis movet efficientem. Vel dicendum, quod movet se in creaturarum productione, ut dictum est, hac dist., quaest. 1, art. 1.]

¹⁰³ Aquinas, *Super de Trinitate*, quest. 5, art. 4, obj. 2, p. 151, line 14-p. 152, line 16. The *De Veritate* from the same period also deals with this question by reference to the 8th book of Averroes' *Commentary*, see quest. 23, art. 1, ad 7 (vol. 22, part 3, p. 654).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, quest. 5, art. 4, ad 2, p. 155, lines 218-223.

¹⁰⁵ Averroes, *Aristotelis Opera cum Averrois Commentariis*, Venice 1562-1574 (reprint Frankfurt 1962), vol. 4: *De Physico*, lib. 8, comm. 40, p. 380 r.

¹⁰⁶ Aquinas, *In Octo Libros Physicorum Aristotelis Expositio*, ed. P.M. Maggiolo, Turin/ Rome 1965, lib. 7, lect. 1, sect. 890, p. 451; see also *ibid.*, lib. 8, lect. 2, 986, p. 509 where Thomas, like Averroes, distinguishes between motion understood *aequivoce* and *proprie dicto*.

but not in that way in which motion is the act of the imperfect”. The *De Anima* is asserted to teach that *sentire* and *intelligere* are motions *communiter*; in this way motion can include *actus perfecti*.¹⁰⁷ In the *Contra Gentiles* likewise, Thomas judges that Plato’s understanding of motion as “any kind of operation” (*accipiebat .. motum pro qualibet operatione*) Aristotle himself “touches in III *de Anima*”. The net result is to dissolve the difference (*nihil differt*) between “a first being which moves itself according to Plato and a first being which is immobile according to Aristotle”.¹⁰⁸ This basis for the same reading is given in the *Sententia libri De Anima* which dates from the same time as the *Prima pars* of the *Summa* (1267-1268). There Themistius, as well as the Arabic commentators, support it.¹⁰⁹

Aquinas supposed that Aristotle did not assert against Plato that intellection was different *from* motion (as text and argument of the *De Anima* say), but that intellection was a different kind *of* motion. Commenting on *De Anima* III, 7, 431a1 Aquinas says of *sentire* that “if it be called motion, it is another kind of motion from that with which the *Physics* deals” (*alia species motus*). Physical motion is the act of the imperfect.

But this motion is the act of the perfect ... and therefore simply different from physical motion (*set iste motus est actus perfecti ... et ideo est motus simpliciter alter a motu physico*). Motion of this kind is properly called operation, e.g. sensing, understanding and willing, and, according to Plato, it is according to this motion that the soul moves itself, in so far as it knows and loves its own self.¹¹⁰

Themistius, in his *Commentary on Aristotle’s De Anima*, according to William of Moerbeke’s translation finished in 1267, spoke of the same passage in a like way. He distinguished between motion of the imperfect and this which is “not motion totally” but “another kind of motion” (*illius operatio ... neque motus totaliter ... altera species motus*).¹¹¹ In the *Great Commentary* of Averroes, at this place, we find the same language. The text as it is paraphrased speaks of *alius modus motus, actio perfecti*. In the commentary Averroes justifies this way of speaking because these acts of understanding do not involve transmutation or alteration and are self-complete.¹¹² The *Liber de Causis* is governed throughout by such a conception of these operations.

Plotinus, Simplicius, Proclus, the Arabic Neoplatonic Aristotelians are not Aquinas’ only sources for this idea crucial to reconciling Plato and Aristotle. Thomas also finds it in the Pseudo-Dionysius. In commenting at length on the assertion of intellectual motion in the *De Divinis Nominibus*, he refers to “the Philosopher in III *De Anima*” teaching *duplex est motus*.¹¹³ In the *Quaestiones Disputatae De Anima*, which Professor Bazán dates between November 1267 and September 1268, Thomas again draws Aristotle and Plato together on the motion of the soul. He tells us that this involves conceiving motion *large pro omni*

¹⁰⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* pars 1, quest. 18, art. 3 ad 1; see *ibid.*, art. 1, resp.: *motus accipitur communiter, prout motus dicitur actus perfecti, prout intelligere et sentire dicitur moveri, ut dicitur in III De. An.*; and pars 1, quest. 58, art. 1, ad 1: *intelligere et sentire dicuntur motus, ut dicitur in De Anima*.

¹⁰⁸ Aquinas, *Liber de Veritate Catholicae Fidei contra errores Infidelium seu “Summa contra Gentiles”*, ed. C. Pera, 4 vols., Turin/ Rome 1961, lib. 1, cap. 13, sect. 90 (b), vol. 2, p. 17.

¹⁰⁹ Aquinas, *Sententia libri De Anima*, lib. 1, cap. 6, p. 30, lines 219-22; lib. 1, cap. 10, p. 51, lines 207-10.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, lib. 3, cap. 6, p. 230, lines 20-36.

¹¹¹ Themistius, *Commentaire sur le Traité de l’âme*, lib. 6, p. 252, lines 63-69.

¹¹² Averrois Cordubensis, *Commentarium magnum in Aristotelis De Anima Libros*, ed. F.S. Crawford, Cambridge, Mass. 1953 (Corpus Commentariorum Averrois in Aristotelem VI, 1), lib. 3, comm. 28, pp. 465-467.

¹¹³ Aquinas, *In librum Beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio*, ed. C. Pera, Turin/ Rome 1950, proemium, cap. 4. lect. 7, sect. 369, p. 121.

operatione. Plato, he writes, teaches that soul is immortal and *per se subsistentem* because *mouet se ipsam*.¹¹⁴ His source for this teaching here is probably Macrobius, *In Somnium Scipionis*. This commentary, well known in the Middle Ages, has a long treatment of Plato and Aristotle on the motion of the soul in the context of a consideration of its immortality.¹¹⁵ The *In Somnium Scipionis* is explicitly invoked by Aquinas in the *De Unitate Intellectus*.¹¹⁶ Macrobius opposes Plato and Aristotle on the motion of the soul for the sake of showing Plato's superiority, but Thomas stands within and knows of another interpretation of Aristotle which requires a less one-sided result.

Ultimately, the same is true for his treatment of Plato. Thomas' strategy with respect to Plato stands more and more within the harmonizing hermeneutic of his late Antique predecessors in the commentary traditions, most notably Themistius and Simplicius. They lie behind his remarkable treatment of Aristotle's criticism of Plato in the first book of the *De Anima*. "Often when Aristotle criticises the opinions of Plato, he does not reject them in respect to Plato's intention (*intentionem*), but with respect to their literal sense (*sonum uerborum eius*)". The trouble is that "Plato had a bad way of teaching: for he says everything figuratively and teaches through symbols, intending something other through his words than what they themselves say." We all know perfectly well that "Plato did not in truth think that the intellect was a quantitative magnitude or a circle and a circular motion" but Aristotle argues against the literal sense of the words (*secundum quod uerba sonant*) in order to prevent anyone falling into error on the basis of their literal sense.¹¹⁷ As sources for this judgment of Plato, and for Aristotle's treatment of him, the editors of the Leonine edition of 1984 cite Averroes, Albert the Great, Themistius, John Philoponus, and Simplicius. Certainly a justification for Thomas' judgment could be found in the prologue of Simplicius *in Commento Predicamentorum*, which we know he had read before he wrote these remarks, and whose treatment of Plato in relation to Aristotle had evidently impressed him.¹¹⁸

Long before he could compare the Greek interpreters of Plato and Aristotle, Aquinas had imbibed one form of this motionless but moving circle as fundamental to the structure of theology. A consequence of the greatest importance of this assimilation is that 'Procession and Return' is the fundamental form of his *Summa Theologiae*, determining its overall structure as well as its parts, their relations to one another and to the whole. It is generally agreed that Thomas and his teachers derive this pattern, essential to Neoplatonism, from the Pseudo-Dionysius, and that the Areopagite is also the authority for its use.¹¹⁹ His *In De Divinis Nominibus* was probably written at about the same time as the *Prima Pars* of this *Summa* with its stated determination to give the teaching of theology its proper structure. In this commentary Thomas makes clear that he knew and understood the Platonic origin and logic of this structural figure of immanence, *exitus* and *reditus*. Explaining what he finds in Dionysius, he writes: *Omnium rerum praeexistit in divina essentia*. God as *per se bonitatis* is the

¹¹⁴ Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Anima*, ed. D.-C. Bazán. Rome/ Paris 1996 (Commissio Leonina: *Opera Omnia Sancti Thomae de Aquino*, vol. 24, 1), 22* and quest. 1, resp., p. 8, lines 255-259. See Henle, *St. Thomas*, 39.

¹¹⁵ Macrobius, *Commentarium in Somnium*, lib. 2, cap. 13-cap. 16, pp. 133-151.

¹¹⁶ Aquin, *L'Unité de l'intellect*, cap. 3, sect. 74 (de Libera, 148).

¹¹⁷ Aquinas, *Sententia libri De Anima*, lib. 1, cap. 8, p. 38, lines 3-22.

¹¹⁸ Simplicius, *Commentaire sur les Catégories*, vol. 1, prologue, p. 9, lines 83-85.

¹¹⁹ See Hankey, *God in Himself*, 55, 103-106, 130-131, 139-142; idem, 'Theoria versus Poesis: Neoplatonism and Trinitarian Difference in Aquinas, John Milbank, Jean-Luc Marion and John Zizioulas', *Modern Theology* 15:4 (October 1999), 405-407; P. Rorem, "Procession and Return" in Thomas Aquinas and His Predecessors', *The Princeton Seminary Review* 13:2 (1992), 147-163; Wéber, *Dialogue et dissensions*, 18 and 459-470; G. Emery, *La Trinité Créatrice. Trinité and création dans les commentaires aux Sentences de Thomas d'Aquin et de ses précurseurs Albert le Grand et Bonaventure*, Paris 1995 (Bibliothèque thomiste XLVII).

principle and end of the going forth and return of all things.¹²⁰ To make intelligible this doctrine, he tells us: “it must be considered that every effect returns to the cause from which it proceeds (*convertitur ad causam a qua procedit*), as the *Platonici* say.” Each thing *convertitur ad suum bonum*.¹²¹ Because structure for Aquinas has to do with the order of reasons, and so with the relations of theology and philosophy, he thinks about it carefully from the beginning to the end of his writing.¹²² It is, therefore, of the greatest importance that, throughout his work, and most clearly and completely in his last *Summa*, where the treatment is *secundum ordinem disciplinae*, he employs a figure he knows to be Platonic.

Another idea connected to the “metaphorical” motion which belongs to self-knowing, and which is also of great importance structurally, is that found in Proposition 15 of the *Liber de causis*: “Every knower knows its essence. Therefore, it reverts to its essence with a complete reversion” (*rediens ad essentiam suam reversione completa*).¹²³ When he comes at last to exposit the *Liber*, Aquinas traces the components of the idea back to the *Elements* of Proclus and determines that because the activity of the knower is from itself and to itself: “there is a certain circular motion conveyed by the word ‘reversion’ or ‘conversion’” (*quaedam circulatio*).¹²⁴ Earlier he had quoted Proposition 15 in his *Sentences Commentary* to demonstrate the self-sufficiency of what knows itself.¹²⁵ In the *Disputed Questions On Truth*, when considering whether God knows himself, he links the language of remaining, *exitus* and *reditus* to that of the *rediens ad essentiam*.¹²⁶ In the same disputed questions, Proposition 15 and this language is employed to make truth belong properly to intellect because intellectual substances can both *quodam modo extra se procedunt* and can also draw what is outside within a complete self-relation.¹²⁷ Turned yet another way, the Proposition plays a role in the structure of the *Summa Theologiae*, providing the link between ontology and subjectivity.¹²⁸ When moving from the consideration of God’s *esse* to the activities of knowing and loving, it is used to show that perfectly self-sufficient being knows itself.¹²⁹ In all these places the *Liber de causis* is cited as such. Only after he wrote these articles will Thomas be able to connect the whole logic to the *Platonici* by means of the *Elements* of Proclus.

7. The Root of the Platonic Way

For Thomas’ definition of the *radix*, the point of departure and fundamental determining principle of the *via Platoniorum*, we may add accounts from the *De Substantiis Separatis* to those from *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*. Aquinas sets out that root as follows. Plato “proceeded by a more adequate way to refute the position of the early Physicists”

¹²⁰ Aquinas, *In De divinis nominibus*, cap. 1, lect. 3, pp. 28-29, sects. 87-93.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 29, sects. 94.

¹²² See importantly but not exhaustively, Aquinas, *In Sententiarum*, lib. 1, prologue and epilogue; *idem*, *Super de Trinitate*, quest. 2, art. 2; quest. 5, art. 4; quest. 6, art. 4; *idem*, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. 2, cap. 4; lib. 4, cap. 1; *idem*, *Summa Theologiae*, pars 1, quest. 1 and quest. 2, prol.; *idem*, *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Expositio*, ed. M.R. Cathala and R.M. Spiazzi, Turin / Rome 1964, prooemium; *idem*, *Super De causis*, prooemium, and Hankey, ‘Theology as System’.

¹²³ Aquinas, *Super De causis*, 88.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, Prop. 15, p. 90, lines 23-24.

¹²⁵ See Aquinas, *In Sententiarum*, lib. 1, dist. 17, quest. 1, art. 5, ad 2; lib. 2, dist. 19, quest. 1, art. 1, resp.

¹²⁶ Aquinas *De Veritate*, quest. 2, art. 2, ad 2, p. 45-46.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, quest. 1, art. 9, resp., p. 29.

¹²⁸ On which see F.-X. Putallaz, *Le sens de la reflexion chez Thomas d’Aquin*, Paris 1991 (Etudes de philosophie medievale lxxvi) and K. Corrigan, ‘L’auto-réflexivité et l’expérience humaine dans l’*Ennéade* V, 3 [49], et autres traités: de Plotin à Thomas d’Aquin’, *Études sur Plotin*, ed. M. Fattal, Paris / Montreal 2000, 149-172.

¹²⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, pars 1, quest. 14, art. 2, obj. 2 and ad 2; see Hankey, *God in Himself*, 96-114.

(*sufficiantiori via processit ad opinionem primorum Naturalium evacuandam*). They thought it impossible for humans “to know the certain truth of things” (*certam rerum veritatem sciri*) because of the continuous flux of bodies and the deception of the senses.¹³⁰ Plato, agreeing with them *quod sensibilia semper in fluxu*, and *quod virtus sensitiva non habet certum iudicium de rebus*,¹³¹ solved this by “positing natures separated from the matter of the fluctuating things (*naturas a materia fluxibilium rerum separatas*) in which the truth would be fixed (*veritas fixa*). By adhering to these our soul would know the truth.”

Thus, according to this reasoning, because the intellect when knowing the truth apprehends something beyond the matter of sensible things, Plato thought some things existed separated from sensible things.¹³²

As Thomas explains in the *Treatise on Spiritual Creatures*, this solution has two aspects: one objective, the other subjective. On the objective side, there are the *species rerum separatis a sensibilibus et immobiles*. From these science derives. However, Plato and Augustine are united in maintaining that these forms themselves are not seen. Rather we have science of things *secundum quod eas mens nostra participat*.¹³³ On the subjective side, another power of knowing is required. Plato posited in humans *virtutem cognoscitivam supra sensum, scil. mentem vel intellectum* “illuminated by a certain superior intelligible sun”.¹³⁴ Augustine also agreed with Plato that knowledge of the truth depended on illumination.

There are a number of crucial points to be extracted from this history, and we must look at more of it. Some have emerged already. For Aquinas, Plato’s work is an essential part of a successful history of philosophical progress. Philosophy begins with two errors which must be overcome. One is the denial that humans can know with certainty. The second is that nothing exists separate from bodies. Plato solves both, solves them together, and his solution is correct so far as they can only be solved together. However, the connection between knowledge of the truth and the existence of separate substances is not what Plato takes it to be.

In an earlier treatment of the ancients, that in the first part of the *Summa Theologiae* (1268), Thomas gives us a highly schematized history. In order to save knowledge Plato simply reversed the Physicists. His motive was right, “to save certain knowledge of the truth as something we can possess intellectually” (*salvare certam cognitionem veritatis a nobis per intellectum haberi*),¹³⁵ however, he solved the problem too immediately. Plato projected what belongs to our thinking on to an external reality.

In common with the Physicists, Plato held that like was known by like (*simile simili cognoscitur*). The Physicists, thinking that nothing except bodies existed, determined the knower from the known: “they thought that the form of the object known should be in the knower in the same way that it is in the thing known” (*Existimabant autem quod forma cogniti sit in cognoscente eo modo quo est in re cognita*).¹³⁶

¹³⁰ Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 1, D 42, lines 66-70.

¹³¹ Aquinas, *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, art. 10, ad 8, p. 132, lines 6-7.

¹³² Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 1, D 42, lines 75-79: *unde secundum hoc quod intellectus veritatem cognoscens aliqua seorsum apprehendit praeter materiam sensibilibus rerum, sic aestimavit esse aliqua a sensibilibus separata*.

¹³³ Aquinas, *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, art. 10, ad 8, p. 132, lines 9-24.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, art. 10, ad 8, p. 132, lines 10-12.

¹³⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, pars 1, quest. 84, art. 1, resp.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pars 1, quest. 84, art. 2, resp.

The *Platonici*, however, laid down the contrary. For Plato, having perceived that the intellectual soul is immaterial and knows immaterially, held that the forms of things known exist immaterially (*formas rerum cognitarum immaterialiter subsistere*).¹³⁷

This move against the Physicists is correct because a reversal is required: “the nature of knowledge is opposite to the nature of materiality” (*ratio cognitionis ex oppositio se habet ad rationem materialitatis*).¹³⁸ But, in simply changing the direction of the likeness so that the structure of knowledge is transferred to reality, Plato remains too close to his adversaries. Certainly, truth requires a likeness of knower and known, but this is only one side of the matter. Knower and known must also be deeply distinguished.

We shall come to Thomas’ criticism of Plato, a criticism as much Neoplatonic as it is Aristotelian. The position from which Thomas corrects Plato is founded in a distinction between understanding and being, between what is known and how it is in the knower. When criticising Plato’s false conflation of these two modes in the late (c1271) commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, he develops this formulation: “the mode of understanding by which the intellect knows must be one kind of mode, and the mode of being by which a thing exists must be another” (*alius sit modus intelligendi quo intellectus intelligit, et alius sit modus essendi quo res existit*).¹³⁹ This principle is implicit in the oft reiterated lapidary and more general principle: “a thing is received according to the mode of the receiver” (*receptum est in recipiente per modum recipientis*).¹⁴⁰ The general principle Thomas recognised in Plato: “Plato saw that each thing is received in something else according to the capacity of the recipient” (*unumquodque recipitur in aliquo secundum mensuram recipientis*).¹⁴¹ Plato, in Thomas’ estimation, seems not to have drawn all the consequences of recognizing this principle. Alternatively, Aquinas has not worked out the consequences for his own understanding of Plato of supposing (falsely) that this Neoplatonic principle was used by him. Before dwelling on his Platonic criticism of Plato, we must continue with Thomas’ representation of Platonism in the *De Substantiis Separatis*, further exposing the *radix* of its *via* and the *positiones* which follow from it.

Aquinas recognises two kinds of intellectual abstraction. One makes mathematics possible because the intellect grasps numbers, magnitudes and figures without sensible matter (*apprehendit numeros mathematicos et magnitudines et figuras mathematicas sine materiae sensibilis*).¹⁴² The other “understands something universal without the consideration of anything particular” (*intelligendo aliquid universale absque consideratione alicuius particularis*).¹⁴³ This distinction is crucial to Thomas’ doctrine of the sciences and is outlined fully in the *Super Boetium De Trinitate*. For Boethius, the distinction between the object of knowledge and the manner of its existence in the knower is altogether crucial. He is among those Neoplatonists from whom Thomas takes it.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Aquinas, *In Metaphysicorum*, cap. 1, lect. 10 [158], p. 47. See Henle, *Saint Thomas*, 330.

¹⁴⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, pars 1, quest. 84, art. 1, resp.

¹⁴¹ Aquinas, *In Metaphysicorum*, cap. 1, lect. 10 [167], p. 48.

¹⁴² Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 1, D 42, lines 80-84.

¹⁴³ Ibid., cap. 1, D 42, lines 89-92.

¹⁴⁴ Aquinas, *Super de Trinitate*, quaestiones 5 and 6, generally, and particularly: Expositio Capituli Secundi, 133, lines 25-29, and quest. 6, art. 1, resp. 3, 162, lines 327ff.; see W.J. Hankey, ‘*Secundum rei vim vel secundum cognoscentium facultatem*’. Knower and known in the *Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius and the *Prosligion* of Anselm’, *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism and Christianity*, ed. J. Inglis, Richmond [England]: Curzon Press, in press and C. Lafleur, ‘Abstraction, séparation et tripartition de la philosophie

In the *De Substantiis Separatis*, Thomas represents Plato as positing two *genera* of entities abstracted from sensible things in accord with these two modes: “mathematicals and universals which he called forms or ideas” (*mathematica et universalia quae species sive ideas nominabat*). Because with mathematical we apprehend many things under one species (*plura unius speciei*), whereas with forms the universal is unique (*homo in universali acceptus secundum speciem est unus tantum*), Plato is represented as establishing a hierarchy in which mathematical are intermediate between the forms and sensibles (*media inter species seu ideas et sensibilia*).¹⁴⁵ Thomas goes on to elaborate and even to compare the Platonic positions in a manner which is clearly dependent on Neoplatonic sources: Dionysius, the *Liber* and the now the *Elements of Theology*.¹⁴⁶ We must follow Thomas’ description of the *positiones* he represents as built by the *Platonici* on the foundation laid by Plato’s attempt to save certain knowledge. But, before this, because Thomas’ understanding of the history of philosophy is schematized through simple oppositions in relation to a fundamental concord, we must clarify his understanding of the *radix* of the Platonic way by explaining further how he sets it in relation to the alternatives.

8. The Ultimate Comparison: Plato, the *Platonici*, Monotheistic Platonisms, Aristotle and the Peripatetics

The *De Substantiis Separatis*, as also the commentary on the *Liber de Causis*, and the last redaction of his exposition of the Epistles of St. Paul, date from 1271 and 1272 when Thomas had at his disposition and was using another of Moerbeke’s translations of Greek Neoplatonic texts (this one finished in 1268), Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*. Comparing the *Liber*, the Dionysian *corpus*, and the *Elements*, as he did explicitly in his exposition of the *Liber*,¹⁴⁷ enabled Aquinas to view simultaneously works of Hellenic, Arabic and Christian Neoplatonism. Crucially, he now knew that all three were Platonic. For a great part of his intellectual activity, he had thought one of them (the *Liber*) was by Aristotle and another (the Dionysian *corpus*) had seemed philosophically to have an Aristotelian character.

In his *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, the fruit of his first teaching in Paris (1252-1254), Thomas judged *Dionysius autem fere ubique sequitur Aristotelem, ut patet diligenter inspicienti libros eius*.¹⁴⁸ But by the time he wrote his *Expositio super librum De divinis nominibus* (between 1265-1268), he had discerned that the style and *modo loquendi* of Dionysius was that used by the *Platonici*.¹⁴⁹ When later (probably about 1272), he wrote the last question of his *Quaestiones Disputatae De Malo*, he was definite about the philosophical allegiance of the Areopagite: *Dionysius qui in plurimis fuit sectator sententiae Platonicae*.¹⁵⁰ His final judgment about Dionysius goes with another change, that in his view of Aristotle.

théorétique: Quelques éléments de l’arrière-fond farabien et arrien de Thomas d’Aquin, *Super Boetium <<De Trinitate>>*, question 5, article 3; *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales* 67:2 (2000), 249-269.

¹⁴⁵ Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 1, D 42, lines 94-104.

¹⁴⁶ For a treatment of part of the subsequent history with a note about Thomas’ place in it, see I.G. Stewart, ‘Mathematics as Philosophy: Barrow and Proclus’, *Dionysius* 18 (2000), 151-182.

¹⁴⁷ Saffrey, *Super De causis*, xxxvi: “Saint Thomas, lorsqu’il commentait le *Liber de Causis*, avait trois livres ouverts devant lui: le texte du *Liber*, un manuscrit de l’*Elementatio* et un *corpus* dionysien.”

¹⁴⁸ Aquinas, *In Sententiarum*, lib. 2, dist. 14, quest. 1, art. 2, p. 164. A consideration of the fundamental reasons for this apparently strange association is Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology*. On his assimilation of Dionysius and Aristotle, see also F. O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, Leiden 1992 (Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 32), 83-105 and Hankey, ‘Dionysian Hierarchy in St. Thomas’, 422 ff.

¹⁴⁹ Aquinas, *In De divinis nominibus*, proemium, p. 1.

¹⁵⁰ Aquinas, *De Malo*, quest. 16, art. 1, ad 3, p. 283, lines 389-390.

Thomas' view of Aristotelianism had been shaped within the tradition of Neoplatonic commentary, aspects of which his own work continued, and partly as a result of the traditional ascription of the *Liber* to Aristotle. This, at least to a degree, accounts for his thinking that "Dionysius nearly everywhere follows Aristotle". After reading the *Elements of Theology* and comparing it with the *Liber* and the writings of Dionysius, some of his earlier judgments about the Aristotelianism of the two monotheistic authors were confirmed.

Making this comparison, Thomas found that the doctrine of the *De Divinis Nominibus* was a monotheistically modified Platonism like that of the *Liber de causis*.¹⁵¹ The author of the *Liber* reduces the plurality of the divine hypostases. With the consequent elevation of the First, its creativity as absolute source is correspondingly secured and exalted.¹⁵² Looking at the doctrine of Proclus, his view is confirmed that even the Platonists teach that the First is the cause of the substance of what follows it.¹⁵³ Nonetheless, he judges that the doctrine of creation is more securely taught by Aristotle because of his refusal to posit universals existing *per se*. In the exposition of the *Liber*, Aquinas associates its author and Dionysius with Aristotle in a criticism of features of pagan Platonism.¹⁵⁴ He uses Dionysius to correct them all. As Vivian Boland puts it:

Dionysius must be interpreted always as a Catholic believer ... In Saint Thomas' commentary on the *Liber de causis* 'the faith' tells against Proclus and against 'platonic positions', against the 'Auctor', against Aristotle, but never against Dionysius who remains for Saint Thomas an authoritative source for what the faith teaches.¹⁵⁵

Now, however, he no longer thinks that the *Liber de Causis* is Aristotle's own theology:

It seems that someone from among the Arabic philosophers excerpted this from the *Elements* of Proclus, especially since everything contained in this book is found more fully and diffusely in that of Proclus.¹⁵⁶

His new knowledge about what is Aristotelian and what Platonic, and about the complex Platonic hierarchy, does not, however, turn Thomas further away from the *Platonici*. Not only does the *De Substantiis Separatis* give Plato credit for getting philosophy decisively beyond the materialism of the "ancient Naturalists" but, on the number and kinds of the separate substances, Aquinas chooses elements from the Platonic way of reasoning, as well as some of its conclusions, against that of the Philosopher.

That for which Thomas favors Aristotle strikes at the heart of Platonism, because Thomas represents Plato's aim in positing the separate substances to be to save the certainty of knowledge. In a statement which may echo what he found in Simplicius *Upon the Categories*, and matches what he writes of the first of the *quinque viae* in the *Summa Theologiae*, he judges that Aristotle's way of reasoning, *per viam motus*, to the existence of separate

¹⁵¹ Aquinas, *Super De causis*, prop. 3, p. 20, line 5-p. 21, line 5; prop. 12, p. 80, line 7-10.

¹⁵² E. Perl, 'Hierarchy and Participation in Dionysius the Areopagite and Greek Neoplatonism', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* LXVIII (1994), 15-30 judges that the oppositions at the center of this criticism are false.

¹⁵³ Aquinas, *Super De causis*, prop. 3, p. 22, line 4-p. 23, line 20.

¹⁵⁴ E.g.: Ibid., prop. 3, p. 25, lines 21-24; prop. 5, p. 38, lines 14-20; prop. 10, p. 67, line 19-p. 68, line 28; prop. 13, p. 83, lines 8-17; prop. 18, p. 103, lines 16-23; see Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, xxi.

¹⁵⁵ Boland, *Ideas in God*, 310 see Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 18, D 71, lines 1-12.

¹⁵⁶ Aquinas, *Super De causis*, proemium, p. 3, lines 7-10.

substances is *manifestior et certior*.¹⁵⁷ It is essential to this ‘way of motion’ that it starts with sensibly known corporeal existence. For Aquinas the heart of philosophy is its solution to the problem of knowing, and success with this is the common standard in his treatment of both philosophers. There is, however, a deficiency in Aristotle’s *alia via*.

Aristotle is not compelled to his error by an absolute necessity. Nonetheless, what is defective in his way matches its virtue. His staying “with what does not depart much from what is evident to sense” gives a greater certainty to our rational knowledge of the existence of separate substances. It shows its limits, however, when determining their kinds and numbers. On this Aristotle’s position seems “less sufficient than the position of Plato”.¹⁵⁸ Aristotle wants only a dual order of separate substances and ties their numbers to those necessary to move the heavens.

As against these opinions Thomas asserts, first, that the phenomena associated with demon possession and magic “can in no way be reduced to a corporeal cause” (*nullo modo possunt in causam corporalem reduci*). These phenomena require the kind of explanation “through some intellectual substances” which Thomas associates with the Platonists.¹⁵⁹ He is against a reduction of the phenomena to “the power of the heavenly bodies and of other natural things” (*ex virtute celestium corporum et aliarum naturalium rerum*). He sides with Augustine and with Plotinus and the Platonists (as represented by Augustine and many others), in asserting the existence of demons which lie outside what he takes as Aristotle’s two-fold order of separated substances. Thomas understands the position he opposes, which is reported by Augustine in his consideration of Porphyry’s *Letter to Anebo the Egyptian*, to be a description of what was held by *Perypathetici Aristotilis secatores*, who seem to stand to Aristotle in the way that the *Platonici* stand to Plato. Since there is no mention of Aristotle or the Peripatetics in the text of *De Civitate Dei* on which this reference depends, Aquinas would seem to have deduced that this must be an Aristotelian position on the basis of his understanding of what is inherent in this *via*.¹⁶⁰

Nonetheless, even on this matter Aristotle is partly right. His correct solution to the fundamental epistemological problem saves him, just as Plato’s error in what is fundamental to the task of philosophy brings the Platonists one problem after another. Aristotle did not fall into the worst possible errors to which his approach might have tempted him. It is clear from the *Summa contra Gentiles* that Thomas does not regard him as returning to the kind of position he associates with the *Naturales* where intellectual operations would be subject to bodies.¹⁶¹ In this Aristotle is, as he himself says, a Platonist. But, at the point where Aristotle is right on the kinds of separate substances, we return to the way in which his position seems more congruent with Biblical monotheism than does the opinion of the Platonists.

The Platonic multiplication of separate substances enables them to discover the demons intermediate between intellects and humans. However, it also draws them to posit intermediates where they do not exist. The result is a problem both in respect of kinds and of numbers.

¹⁵⁷ Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 2, D 44, lines 11-13. Compare *Summa Theologiae*, pars 1, quest. 2, art. 3, resp.: *Prima autem et manifestior via est, quae sumitur ex parte motus. Certum est enim et sensu constat aliqua moveri in hoc mundo*. Simplicius also judges the Aristotelian way to have a more persuasive necessity in virtue of its relation to sense, see *Commentaire sur les Catégories*, prologus, p. 8, line 74-p. 9, line 85.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, cap. 2, D 45, lines 97-100.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, lines 103-118.

¹⁶⁰ Aquinas, *De Malo*, quest. 16, art. 1, resp. p. 282, lines 285-305.

¹⁶¹ Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, liber 3, pars 2, cap. 84 and cap. 104.

In expositing the *Liber de causis*, and in the *De Substantiis Separatis*, as well as in earlier works,¹⁶² Thomas notes that, for the sake of enabling knowledge, the *Platonici* posited an order of separate forms of things upon which intellects depended. One level of these were entities like the good itself, intellect itself and life itself. Overall, this way of solving the epistemological dilemma involved a false separation of the object from the subject of intellection, i.e. the separation of “gods, which is what Plato called the separate intelligible forms” (*deos dicebat esse species intelligibiles separatas*), from intellects.¹⁶³ Significantly, he explains elsewhere that we call these universal forms “gods” because of their universal causality.¹⁶⁴ The “order of gods, that is of ideal forms (*formarum idealium*) has an order among itself corresponding to the order of the universality of forms.”¹⁶⁵ The philosophical error involved in this separation of subject and object has religious consequences. On this aspect of the kinds of separate substances, Aristotle’s parsimony is “more consonant with the Christian faith”. He does not need separate forms to explain how we know and “we do not posit other separate forms above the order of intellectual beings” (*alias formas separatas supra intellectuum ordinem*). God himself contains all these formal perfections, and there is no order intermediate between him and knowing beings.¹⁶⁶ Aristotle, Dionysius, Augustine and the author of the *Liber* agree in this.

There is also an error in respect to number associated with the Platonic false separation of the object and the subject of understanding. Despite the beginning from intelligible reasons, which they supposed themselves to have made, ultimately the Platonists could not escape determining the numbers of the separated intelligible forms from sensible things. For Aquinas, philosophical reason has, in fact, no other real beginning of its knowing except from the sensible. In consequence, the Platonists do not avoid reproducing the sensible world in the intelligible realm: “For, since they are not able to arrive at knowledge of such substances except from sensible things, they supposed the former to be of the same species as the latter, indeed, better, to be their species” (*magis species istarum*).¹⁶⁷

Having mediated between Aristotle and the Platonists on the kinds of separate substances, Thomas continues in the *De Substantiis Separatis* with an attack on Aristotelian parsimony in respect to their number. The problem with the Aristotelian argument on this point is at base the same problem as on the first. This time, however, we are dealing with Aristotle’s own writings not those of the *secutores*, and we come directly up against what is essential to his way, i.e. *per viam motus*. Reasoning according to this way, Aristotle makes a mistake which Aquinas now shows to be unnecessary according to his own principles. Indeed Thomas turns Aristotle against himself by means of “his own procedure and very words” (*ipse processus, ipsa verba*)¹⁶⁸ -- Aquinas must see this as a just retribution given the literal interpretation he discerns Aristotle and his followers imposing on the words of Plato! Because, for Aristotle, every heavenly motion must have a reason, the Philosopher deduces the number of the immaterial substances from the number of the heavenly motions. In the judgment of Aquinas, reasoning after this manner makes the higher serve the lower, and, as a

¹⁶² Aquinas, *In De divinis nominibus*, cap. 4, lect. 1, sect. 276, p. 88: *Platonici in substantiis separatis distinguunt intelligibilia ab intellectualibus*.

¹⁶³ Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 4, p. D 47, lines 3-19.

¹⁶⁴ Aquinas, *Super De causis*, prop. 3, p. 18, lines 8-14.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, prop. 19, p. 106, lines 5-7.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, prop. 10, p. 67, line 19-68, line 7. He makes much the same point at prop. 13, p. 83, lines 8-17.

¹⁶⁷ Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. 2, cap. 92, p. 263, sect. 1791.

¹⁶⁸ Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 2, D 45, lines 149-150.

result, gets the purposes of things wrong.¹⁶⁹

In the *De Substantiis Separatis* Thomas contents himself with the most minimal of statements. He reasserts the point he had just made in respect to the kinds of spiritual substances and the need for intermediate ones, and then he explains how the argument from purpose must work:

It is more probable that between the first immaterial substance and the heavenly body there would be many orders of immaterial substances, of which the inferior are ordered to the higher in respect to end, and the heavenly body is ordered to the lowest (*infimam*) of these so far as its proximate end is concerned.¹⁷⁰

Provided that they do not make the false separation of *intelligibilia ab intellectualibus*, and commit the errors which follow, Plato and his followers are right as against Aristotle. The *Platonici* look at separated substances and the whole order of thinking beings for their own sakes (*ipsam naturam rerum secundum se considerans*),¹⁷¹ and in relation to the First Principle rather than from below. There are, however, problems here as well. These involve a conflict between the *Platonici* and Dionysius, a conflict in which Thomas wants to “save” both sides. Two principles apply: one of them is explicitly identified with the *Platonici*, the other with Dionysius.

He rightly discovers the *Platonici* maintaining that “the nearer things are to the First Principle, the smaller they are in number” (*quanto aliqua sunt uni primo principio propinquiora, tanto sunt minoris multitudo*).¹⁷² This maxim Thomas finds to be true in respect to kinds at either end of the scale. Thus: *Supremus autem gradus alicuius naturae, vel etiam infimus, est unus tantum*.¹⁷³ Dionysius asserts the contrary principle, namely, the better is greater (*melius est magis*), and rightly concludes that the multitude of the incorporeal heavenly hosts far surpasses that of material things.¹⁷⁴ The more noble the nature, the more copiously it produces (*ea quae nobiliora sunt illa copiosius in esse producat*).¹⁷⁵ This is a principle Thomas will also recognise as Platonist.¹⁷⁶ Being a good Platonist, Thomas is able to save both of these two opposed arguments. The *dictum Dionysii*, is *salvatur*, together with the simplicity at either end of the cosmos, because, though there are fewer highest kinds, the numbers within each of the ranks are immensely greater.¹⁷⁷ Thomas faithfully and carefully works out his Platonist solution within the angelic hierarchy itself in respect to the angels which always remain in the divine presence as opposed to those lesser angels sent forth to minister to what is below them. He determines that there are immensely more “assisting” than “ministering” angels.¹⁷⁸

This consideration brings us to the law which for Aquinas governs the spiritual

¹⁶⁹ He makes these same arguments in *Summa Theologiae*, pars 1, quest. 50, art. 3, ad 3.

¹⁷⁰ Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 2, D 45, lines 168-173.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, cap. 4, p. D 47, lines 31-35.

¹⁷² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, pars 1, quest. 112, art. 4, ad 2.

¹⁷³ Aquinas, *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, art. 8, ad 10, p. 99. On this in Proclus see T. Kukkonen, ‘Proclus on Plenitude’, *Dionysius* 18 (2000), 118ff.

¹⁷⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, pars 1, quest. 112, art. 4, ad 2.

¹⁷⁵ Aquinas, *De Potentia*, quest. 6, art. 6, resp., vol. 2, p. 175.

¹⁷⁶ See especially his comments on Proposition 22 (where he speaks of *causa prima est ipsa bonitatis interminata* and traces this back to Proclus) and Propositions 1, 4, 10; 16 (*ens separatum habet quidem potentiam infinitam*), 17, 20, 21, 24.

¹⁷⁷ Aquinas, *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, art. 8, ad 10, p. 99.

¹⁷⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, pars 1, quest. 112, art. 4, ad 2.

realm, the so-called *Lex divinitatis*. This is the law of complete mediation, a law which, although Aquinas does not know this, he owes to Iamblichus. It comes to him through Dionysius who certainly has it from Proclus. This law, which for Aquinas is determinative even for the realm of grace, he spells out at the beginning of his writing. It is crucial for his thinking all the way through. In everything from the interpretation of Scripture to the structure and reason of the angelic hierarchy, relations within the Church and between *ecclesia* and *imperium*, the *Lex divinitatis* is fundamental and admits of no exceptions.¹⁷⁹ Here is a formulation from his *Commentary on the Sentences* where he is quoting Dionysius:

“This is the invariably established divine law: that the last are perfected by the first through media.” But between us and the first angels the inferiors intermedicate. Therefore, the action of the first does not come to us immediately, but through a second mediating rank.¹⁸⁰

When Thomas used this as a *sed contra* on the question of whether all angels are sent to minister to what is below them, he seems to be thinking of Dionysius’ *Celestial Hierarchy*, and he finds the same doctrine in the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* and the *Divine Names*.¹⁸¹ He was convinced that, on the contracting and particularization of the divine universality and simplicity through a mediating hierarchy joining first to last without gaps, there was a remarkable accord. Paul’s vision conveyed by Dionysius, the primitive church, and philosophy were at one.¹⁸² In the *Sentences* commentary, Thomas mentions Avicenna from among philosophers but tells us nothing more about what convinced him that philosophy understood the law of hierarchy.

When, about a decade later, Thomas finalized his *In De Divinis Nominibus*, he identifies the *Lex divinitatis* in what he understands as a discussion by Dionysius of how God is known. “God is known from all things” because God “leads things into being, and not only gives *esse* to things, but also *esse* comes with order in things” so far as they are joined according to the *Lex divinitatis*: “Because ‘always the end of the first things’, that is, the bottom of the highest, is joined to the ‘first beings of the second’, that is, to the highest beings of the lower.”¹⁸³ In his exposition of the *Liber de causis*, he quotes this statement of the Law when commenting on Proposition 19 which gives a Platonic account of the order of rational beings. It distinguishes between, and connects in a descending causal chain, *intelligentia divina*, *intelligentia tantum*, *anima intelligibilis*, and *anima tantum*, from which we arrive at *corpora naturalia tantum*. Thomas’ explanation refers us to proposition 106 of the *Elements*

¹⁷⁹ See Hankey, ‘Aquinas, Pseudo-Denys, Proclus and Isaiah’ and idem, “‘Dionysius dixit, Lex divinitatis est ultima per media reducere’”: Aquinas, hierocracy and the “augustinisme politique”, *Tommaso D’Aquino: proposte nuove di lettura. Festschrift Antonio Tognolo*, ed. Ilario Tolomio, *Medioevo*. 18 (1992), 119-150.

¹⁸⁰ Aquinas, *In Sententiarum*, lib. 2, dist. 10, quest. 1, art. 2, *sed contra* 1, p. 152: *secundum dionysium, “haec est lex divinitatis inviolabiliter stabilita; quod a primis ultima per media perficiantur”. Sed inter nos et primos angelos sunt medii inferiores. Ergo primorum actio immediate non pervenit ad nos, sed est per medios secundos.*

¹⁸¹ In fact the *Lex* became so generally used that its formulations soon became independent of the text of Dionysius, see Hankey, “‘Dionysius dixit’”, 143-146 and idem, ‘Augustinian Immediacy and Dionysian Mediation in John Colet, Edmund Spenser, Richard Hooker and the Cardinal de Bérulle’, *Augustinus in der Neuzeit, Colloque de la Herzog August Bibliothek de Wolfenbüttel, 14-17 octobre, 1996*, ed. D. de Courcelles, Turnhout 1998, 151-152.

¹⁸² Aquinas, *In Sententiarum*, lib. 2, dist. 10, quest. 1, art. 2, *sed contra* 1, p. 152.

¹⁸³ Aquinas, *In De divinis nominibus*, cap. 7, lect. 4, p. 275, sect. 733. On Dionysius as teaching Aquinas to understand *esse* as ordered see R. te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, Leiden 1995 (Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters xlvii).

(on intermediates between what is wholly eternal and what is in time) and then to the *De Divinis Nominibus* of Denys.¹⁸⁴ He makes the categories of Proclus, of the *Liber de causis*, and of Dionysius cohere. Therefore, Thomas is now perfectly clear about the Platonic character of this doctrine in Dionysius.

At the conclusion of the *In De Divinis Nominibus* Thomas correctly recognises the context within which the Law emerges as Platonic. Moreover, he grasps the logic, if not the fact, of its Iamblichan origin, namely, the strong elevation of the Good beyond being and knowing. The necessity of a great chain which always links highest to lowest through a middle appears to the extent that the universe of beings upon which our knowledge of the Principle depends has its origin above being and so also beyond knowledge.¹⁸⁵ Explaining why *essentia Deitatis est occulta* for Dionysius, he tells us that: *Platonici posuerunt Deum summum esse quidem super ens et super vitam et super intellectum, non tamen super ipsum bonum quod ponebant primum principium*.¹⁸⁶ He goes on to assert his own doctrine that “in this present life our intellect is not so joined to God as to see his essence but so that it knows of God what he is not.”¹⁸⁷ In commenting on Proposition 6 of the *Liber*, Aquinas uses Proclus to explain why the superessential unity of the Platonic Principle is entirely beyond being known.¹⁸⁸ He judges, however, that there is a difference between Dionysius and the *Platonici* in this regard. Their *causa prima* is unknowable because it *excedit etiam ipsum ens separatim*. In contrast, *secundum rei veritatem*, a position which always includes Dionysius, *causa prima est supra ens in quantum est ipsum esse infinitum*.¹⁸⁹ Despite the Dionysian negative theology, his First is a form of *esse*.

Thomas’ statements about the Proclean principle beyond being and the position of Dionysius which concedes something to this logic of God as ineffable non-being, without becoming an exclusive henology, have hold of a good part of what is going on here.¹⁹⁰ Before passing from this treatment of the Platonic logic of spiritual being, as Aquinas understands it, two further points may be made. The first concerns Thomas’ understanding of the Neoplatonic One. The second concerns his understanding of the hypostases.

When treating the divine unity in the *Summa Theologiae* and in his commentaries on the *Posterior Analytics*, *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, *De Caelo*, and in other places, Aquinas maintains that Plato *non distinguebat inter unum quod est principium numeri et unum quod convertitur cum ente*. In consequence, like Pythagoras, Plato held that “the one which is the principle of number would be the substance of things”.¹⁹¹ This confusion of categories exposes how Platonists like Proclus conceive the One which they elevate above being. In consequence of this transcendence, the First must be unknowable “because that which intellect first grasps (*acquiritur*) is being (*ens*)”.¹⁹² Nonetheless, Thomas uses a logic of the One. He teaches that

¹⁸⁴ Aquinas, *Super De causis*, prop. 19, pp. 104-107.

¹⁸⁵ On the Platonism essential to how Thomas treats the knowledge of God, see P. Quinn, *Aquinas, Platonism and the Knowledge of God*, Aldershot 1996 (Avebury Series in Philosophy). What Quinn finds is conveyed by the *péripatétisme arabe* discussed in de Libera, *La querelle*, 113-124.

¹⁸⁶ Aquinas, *In De divinis nominibus*, cap. 13, lect. 3, p. 369, sect. 994.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 370, sect. 996.

¹⁸⁸ Aquinas, *Super De causis*, prop. 6, p. 44. At p. 40 Thomas connects Dionysius and Proclus on the unknowability of God.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47, lines 8-22. On Thomas’ assimilation of Dionysius’ doctrine to his own see O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 123, 275 and 132ff.

¹⁹⁰ See Hankey, ‘Denys and Aquinas’, 165-173.

¹⁹¹ Aquinas, *In De Caelo*, lib. 3, lect. 4, sect. 568, p. 291 and *idem*, *Summa Theologiae*, pars 1, quest. 11, art. 1, ad 1; see Henle, *St. Thomas*, 210-211 for list of texts and an analysis.

¹⁹² Aquinas, *Super De causis*, prop. 6, p. 44, lines 5-6.

unum has the nature of *principium* and, in general, follows a Neoplatonic path mediated by Dionysius.¹⁹³ In the *Summa Theologiae*, he begins from the divine unity, proceeds in stages toward multiplicity which is reduced or converted to simple beginning. Indeed, he even orders the treatment of the divine *esse* from simplicity to unity.¹⁹⁴ *Esse*, as act of being, so located and simplified, has a Neoplatonic character and origin.¹⁹⁵ Henle was unable to locate Aquinas' source for his misrepresentation of the Neoplatonic One as quantitative. Jan Aertsen has solved the problem. Thomas derived it from Averroes' commentary on the *Metaphysics* where The Commentator is criticising Avicenna.¹⁹⁶

So far as the hypostases are concerned, Aquinas understands what is happening to theology in Dionysius. In *De Divinis Nominibus* he writes:

The Platonists, whom in this book Denys imitates much, ... posited separated realities existing *per se*. ... Indeed, these separated principles they laid down as mutually distinct in respect to the First Principle which they called the *per se* good, and the *per se* one. Denys agrees with them in one way, and disagrees in another. He agrees in that he too posits life existing separately *per se*, and likewise wisdom, and being, and other things of this kind. He dissents from them, however, in this: he does not say that these separated principles are diverse entities (*esse diversa*), but that they are in fact one principle, which is God.¹⁹⁷

Thereby, Thomas locates Dionysius midway between himself and the Platonists. This is a position he will maintain, wittingly or unwittingly, when he is comparing Dionysius, the *Liber de causis* and the *Elements* of Proclus.

9. A Neoplatonic criticism of Plato

After setting out the *positiones* of the *Platonici* in the first Chapter of the *De Substantiis Separatis*, Thomas turns to the *opinio Aristotilis* when speaking of the ineffectiveness of the root of Plato's position (*positionis radix invenitur efficaciam non habere*). Knowledge does not require that the structure of understanding and of being should correspond: "It is not necessary that what the intellect understands separately should have a separate existence in the natural world" (*ea quae intellectus separatim intelligit separatim esse habeant in rerum natura*). In consequence, there is no need either to posit "separate universals so that they can subsist outside singulars" or "mathematicals outside sensibles".¹⁹⁸ For Aquinas, Aristotle seems to give the alternative to the false positing of entities which the Platonic projection of the

¹⁹³ Aquinas, *In De divinis nominibus*, cap. 13, lects. 2 and 3.

¹⁹⁴ See W.J. Hankey, 'The *De Trinitate* of St. Boethius and the Structure of St. Thomas' *Summa Theologiae*', *Atti del Congresso Internazionale di Studi Boeziani*, ed. L. Obertello, Rome 1981, 367-375, idem, *God in Himself*, 57-80 and E.C. Sweeney, 'Thomas Aquinas' Double Metaphysics of Simplicity and Infinity', *International Philosophical Quarterly* 33 (1993), 297-317.

¹⁹⁵ See W.J. Hankey, 'Aquinas' First Principle, Being or Unity?' *Dionysius* 4 (1980), 133-172; K. Corrigan, 'A Philosophical Precursor to the Theory of Essence and Existence in St. Thomas Aquinas', *The Thomist* 48 (1984), 219-240; A. de Libera and C. Michon, *L'Être et l'Essence. Le vocabulaire médiéval de l'ontologie deux traités De ente et essentia de Thomas d'Aquin et Dietrich de Freiberg*, Paris 1986, 29-36 and D. Bradshaw, 'Neoplatonic Origins of the Act of Being', *The Review of Metaphysics* 53 (1999), 383-401.

¹⁹⁶ J.A. Aertsen, *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals. The Case of Thomas Aquinas*, Leiden 1996 (Brill Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters lii), 215.

¹⁹⁷ Aquinas, *In De divinis nominibus*, cap. 5, lect. 1, sect. 634, p. 235.

¹⁹⁸ Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 2, D 43, line 1-D 44, line 8.

structures of intellection on to reality involves. All the errors of the *Platonici* seem to flow from their confused failure to hold to objective reality. In fact, however, there is a subjectivity essential to the position from which Thomas criticises Plato, a subjectivity which is decisively Neoplatonic.¹⁹⁹

In the *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, Thomas tells us that *Pittagoras et Platonici* fell into error because they failed to distinguish properly between *separatio* and *abstractio*. *Separatio* is the *operatio* by which the intellect knows the divine realities which are studied by theology and metaphysics and which are *in re* separate from matter and motion. *Abstractio*, proper, has two distinct operations by which the intellect brings into being the mathematical and the universals which constitute mathematics and all the other sciences.²⁰⁰ The *Platonici* treat the results of *abstractio*, which are mental entities only, as if they were really separate. Thus, having projected the results of mental abstraction on to reality, they place vision where, in fact, there is the creativity of the agent intellect. Holding in common with the *Naturales* the principle that 'like is known by like', the Platonists have merely reversed what was the direction of thought for the ancient Physicists. The older thinkers made the intellectual corporeal, the *Platonici* make what comes from the sensible by abstraction into separate intellectual beings.²⁰¹ Henle showed that this reversal of the "moving direction" while maintaining the common oldest assumptions about the nature of sensible reality -- it is in flux -- and of how mind works -- like is known by like -- is for Aquinas the fundamental problem with Platonism.²⁰² More recently Claude Lafleur has revealed that Thomas' criticism of the Platonic confusion of *separatio* and *abstractio* stems from a commonplace of teaching in the Faculty of Arts in Paris in the Thirteenth century.²⁰³ Alain de Libera has demonstrated that this theory about how the sciences are constructed, assumed by Thomas and his contemporaries, was developed by the Arabic Aristotelians in their following of the Greek Neoplatonists. Alfarabi and his fellows located within a Neoplatonised Aristotelian *corpus* the movement of the soul from *abstractio* to *separatio*, which is for them and for Thomas, the ascent by which we have union with the divine.²⁰⁴

What is the perspective from which Aquinas mounts this criticism of Plato and the *Platonici*? In fact, it is a principle which, as we noted above, he recognised as Platonic, namely, "a thing is received according to the mode of the receiver". This general rule he finds both in Dionysius and in the *Liber de causis*.²⁰⁵ Among the particular applications of the rule is its use to distinguish the mode of the thing known as it is *in re* from its mode in the knower. Thomas found this application in the *Liber de causis* and in Dionysius.²⁰⁶ However, he also finds it in Boethius where it is central to the argument of the *Consolation of Philosophy*. Crucially, there it explicitly involves a turn to the subject in knowing because Lady Philosophy finds that the false objectivity of the Stoics leads to determinism.²⁰⁷ From Boethius, Thomas learned very early that cognition should be considered according to *duplex*

¹⁹⁹ See C. Lafleur, 'Abstraction, séparation et objet de la métaphysique', *Actes du XXVII^e Congrès de l'Association des Sociétés de Philosophie de Langue Française. La métaphysique: son histoire, sa critique, ses enjeux*, ed. L. Langlois and J.-M. Narbonne, Paris/Québec 2000 (Collection Zêtêsis), 217.

²⁰⁰ Aquinas, *Super de Trinitate*, quest. 5, art. 3, resp., p. 149, lines 275-290.

²⁰¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, pars 1, quest. 84, art. 1, resp.

²⁰² Henle, *St. Thomas*, 326.

²⁰³ C. Lafleur, 'Abstraction', 222 and see de Libera, *La querelle*, 114-115.

²⁰⁴ de Libera, *La querelle*, 111.

²⁰⁵ Aquinas, *In Sententiarum*, lib. 2, dist. 17, quest. 2, art. 1, arg. 3.

²⁰⁶ Aquinas, *In De divinis nominibus*, cap. 7, lect. 3, sect. 724; idem *Super De causis*, on propositions 8, 11, 13.

²⁰⁷ Boethius, *Consolatio Philosophiae*, ed. H. Stewart and E. Rand Cambridge, Mass. 1973 (Loeb Classical Library), lib. 5, cap. 4 and 6.

modus, as he puts it in his commentary on the *Sentences*: *scilicet modus rei cognitae et modus cognoscentis, modus quidem rei cognitae non est modus cognitionis, sed modus cognoscentis, ut dicit boethius*.²⁰⁸ It is not a lesson he forgets. This philosophical principle has the support of the highest Patristic authorities.

On this basis Thomas assimilates Boethius to Augustine and the pseudo-Dionysius. In his *Super Boetium de Trinitate*, he wrote:

Boethius uses two different words when he speaks about how we should examine each subject, namely “understood” (*intelligi*) and “grasped” (*capi*), because the method of investigating anything should conform both to things in themselves and to us. If it did not conform to things, they could not be understood, if it did not conform to us, we could not grasp them.²⁰⁹

Henle locates the root of the doctrine in Porphyry where it is certainly present.²¹⁰ In fact, Boethius found it in Ammonius on the *Peri Hermeneias*. There, Ammonius, like Boethius in his *Second Commentary on the De Interpretatione* and in the *Consolation*,²¹¹ is attempting to argue against the notion that divine foreknowledge abolishes the contingent. By protecting contingency both authors aim to maintain the efficacy of prayer. Ammonius solves the problem by a position which he ascribes to *divus Iamblichus* “that knowledge is intermediate between the knower and the known, since it is the activity of the knower concerning the known” (*cognitio media est inter cognoscentem et id quod cognoscitur, siquidem est operatio cognoscentis circa quod cognoscitur*).²¹² It is possible Aquinas might also have found it in Moerbeke’s translation of that commentary which I have just quoted and which he used in his *Expositio Libri Peryrmeias*.

Ammonius would also certainly have known the doctrine from his teacher, Proclus, in whose works it occurs in several contexts, for example, in the *Elements of Theology* at Proposition 124 and elsewhere. The *Elements* is the source of its multiple occurrences in the *Liber de causis*. Its context at Proposition 8 of the *Liber*, as in Proposition 124 of the *Elements*, is the question of the knowledge by intelligences of what is above and below them. Its form is the general assertion that, because it is a substance, every intelligence knows according to the mode of its own substance. Aquinas, when commenting on Proposition 10 of the *Liber*, draws Dionysius, Augustine and Proclus into an accord on the matter. Thus, by the time he was writing this exposition, Aquinas must have recognised the Platonic character both of the general principle that a thing is received according to the mode of the receiver and of its application to cognition. Again, however, Thomas’ knowledge creates a question for us which he does not answer. He does not tell us how he can use a Platonic logical principle as a basis from which to attack the root of the Platonic error as he represents it.

The missing explanation is not in respect to a small matter. L.-B. Geiger in his ground-breaking *La Participation dans la philosophie de S. Thomas d’Aquin* treats *recipere* as a

²⁰⁸ Aquinas, *In Sententiarum*, lib. 1, dist. 38, quest. 1, art. 2, resp.

²⁰⁹ Aquinas, *Super de Trinitate*, Exp. Cap. Secundi, p. 133, lines 25-29: *duo quia modus quo aliqua discutuntur debet congruere et rebus et nobis: nisi enim rebus congrueret, res intelligi non possent, nisi uero congrueret nobis, nos capere non possemus*; see *ibid.*, quest. 6, art. 1, resp. 3, p. 162, lines 327ff. and *Summa Theologiae*, pars 1, quest. 79, art. 8.

²¹⁰ Porphyry, *Sententiae ad Intelligibilia Ducentes*, ed E. Lamberz, Leipzig 1975, c. 10: “All things are in all things but everything is accommodated to the *ousia* of each knower: in the intellect according to *noerôs*, in the soul rationally (*logismôs*) ...”.

²¹¹ Boethius *Consolatio*, lib. 5, cap. 4, pp. 408-10, ll. 72-77.

²¹² Ammonius, *Commentaire sur le Peri Hermeneias*, cap. 9, p. 258, lines 74-78.

synonym of *participare*. In giving examples, Geiger noted those which make participation according to the measure of the participant a form of creation.²¹³ He concluded that the Scholastics have in the law, *Quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur*, “la loi fondamentale du devenir cosmique”.²¹⁴ A crucial reference for such an understanding of creation as the varied modes of reception of the one First Principle is Thomas’ *In De Divinis Nominibus*, the initial lecture of chapter 5, a lecture to which we have referred before. There we find that creation can be treated as *esse receptum et participatum* of the one *ipsum esse subsistens* because “all form received in another is limited and bounded according to the capacity of the receiver”.²¹⁵

To repeat Fr. Geiger’s representation of the role of participation in Thomas’ philosophy would take us beyond the bounds of this essay.²¹⁶ But his analysis stands to remind us that, in respect to Thomas’ fundamental understanding and criticism of Platonism, the same pattern we have detected elsewhere in Thomas’ thought applies -- a pattern we could further demonstrate in other central doctrines and structures.²¹⁷

Thomas’ perspective of judgment is that of a hierarchically ordered unity and division between knower and known. The cosmos he assumes is a hierarchy of substances graded from the most simple to the least unified which is equivalent to a hierarchy of forms of subjectivity. From this perspective of the procession of things to and from the simple, Thomas judges Platonism to be an improper projection of the mode of the subject on to the object of knowledge. In fact, this is to judge Platonism as an incomplete moment within a Neoplatonic structure. Thomas thus assumes as his own the position of a more developed Platonism than he the one ascribes to Plato and his followers! Moreover, as the greatest testimony to the degree to which he has assimilated the Platonisms with which his studies were filled from beginning to end, Thomas constructs his own system within that structure. Notably, in this instance, he follows Dionysius, and his Neoplatonic predecessors, in constituting the spiritual subsistences, the angelic hierarchy, as a descending chain of modes of intellectual reception of the simple, perfect self-subsistent.²¹⁸ These creatures must be in some measure both self-constituted and also created by those above them in the hierarchy. Such notions of how creation takes place raise questions never fully resolved by Aquinas or his fellows in the Jewish, Islamic and Christian following of the pagan Neoplatonists.²¹⁹

This pattern shows Thomas, both as a thinker and as an interpreter of the history of

²¹³ L.-B. Geiger, *La Participation dans la philosophie de S. Thomas d’Aquin*, 2nd ed. Paris 1953 (**Bibliothèque thomiste 23**), p. 11, note 3.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

²¹⁵ Aquinas, *In De divinis nominibus*, cap. 5, lect. 31, p. 234, sect. 629.

²¹⁶ See de Velde, *Participation and Substantiality*; G. Lindbeck, ‘Participation and Existence in the Interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas’, *Franciscan Studies* 17 (1957), 1-22 and 107-125; W.N. Clarke, ‘The Limitation of Act by Potency: Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism?’ *New Scholasticism* 26 (1952), 167-194; C. Fabro, *Participation et causalité selon S. Thomas d’Aquin*, Louvain/Paris 1961 (Chaire Cardinal Mercier, 2); *idem*, ‘The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy. The Notion of Participation’, *Review of Metaphysics* 27 (1974), 449-491 and for surveys of the Neoplatonic interpretation of Aquinas see J. Inglis, *Spheres of Philosophical Inquiry and the Historiography of Mediaeval Philosophy*, Leiden 1998 (Brill’s Studies in Intellectual History 81); Ventimiglia, *Differenza e contraddizione* and L. Cortest, ‘Was St. Thomas Aquinas a Platonist?’ *The Thomist* 52 (1988), 209-19.

²¹⁷ For treatments of aspects of Thomas’ Neoplatonism see Hankey, *God in Himself*, the works noted above, as well as those of Boland, Booth, Bradshaw, Corrigan, Dewan, Geiger, Hochschild, de Libera, O’Rourke, Putallaz, Quinn, Rorem, Sweeney, Taylor, Wéber, listed in the bibliography. This list is by no means complete.

²¹⁸ See Hankey, ‘Aquinas, Pseudo-Denys, Proclus and Isaiah’.

²¹⁹ See J. Trouillard, ‘Procession néoplatonicienne et création judeo-chrétienne’, *Néoplatonisme, mélanges offerts à Jean Trouillard*, Fontenay-aux-Roses, 1981 (Les Cahiers de Fontenay, 19-22), 1-30 and Perl, ‘Hierarchy and Participation’.

philosophy, to be an heir of the Peripatetic and Neoplatonic representations of Platonism, representations in which he was more and more immersed as his work continued. There was always a conflict between his conscious and his unconscious Platonism. But there was no necessity that this conflict should force him outside the tradition in which he placed himself. In fact, his most notable forerunners in this self-conflict are Augustine, as he himself gives evidence, and Dionysius, who in his Christian and Neoplatonic following of the Unknown God was probably as obscure to himself as he remains to us. And last we may add Boethius, who, like Augustine, needed Platonism to console his Christian death.

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