Aquinas’ New Aristotle and the Platonists:

Plotinus unus de magnis…inter commentatores de Aristotelis (Aquinas, De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas)

A lecture for the Medieval Institute of the University of Notre Dame

Background Paper

Pope Leo XIII’s purposes, when he directed the restoration of Christian philosophy “according to the mind of St Thomas Aquinas the Angelic Doctor,” assumed that changes in that mind were rare. Aeterni patris was imbued with a war mentality out to resist the spirit of aggressive innovation in the hope of making philosophy once again firm and strong and solid. Most of those joining in the revival shared the Papal desire that philosophical stability would result from education by the “angelic wisdom” of Thomas. Thus, for Étienne Gilson, the infallibility of the Magisterium and the immutability of Thomas’ philosophy were closely associated. It was impossible both that the Church of Rome was the true Church and that she had made an error about the thinker she had chosen to be her “common doctor.” God’s revelation of his name in Exodus guaranteed Thomas’ metaphysic of esse. Nothing philosophy might discover could unsettle this Christian metaphysic. In fact, despite our judgements contrary to Gilson’s about whence Aquinas arrived at “Qui est” as the most

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2 On the formula, “ad mentem” in Leo XIII’s Cum hoc sit (4 August 1880), see Fergus Kerr, After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 19. For the Pontiff’s view of St Thomas, see Aeterni patris promulgated in the preceding year to which, from Cum hoc sit, a title “On the Restoration of Christian Philosophy According to the Mind of St Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor” was later added; see, for example, the translation of Aeterni patris in volume one of the 1911 translation of the Summa Theologica by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. On the Pope’s intentions, see my “Pope Leo’s Purposes and St. Thomas’ Platonism,” S. Tommaso nella storia del pensiero, in Atti dell’ VIII Congresso Tomistico Internazionale, 8 vols., ed. A. Piolanti, viii, Studi Tomistici 17 (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1982), 39-52.
4 See Alain de Libera, Penser au Moyen Âge (Paris: Seuil, 1991), 39–45 where one finds also a contrasting presentation of Chenu.
5 É. Gilson, Le philosophe et la théologie (Paris: Fayard, 1960), 61: “Il était improbable que l’Église se fût trompée à ce point dans le choix d’un docteur commun et d’un patron de toutes les écoles catholiques. Trois propositions s’offraient ensemble à notre esprit: l’Église de Rome est la véritable Église; Thomas d’Aquin, comme le disait parfois le P. Laberthonnière, a fait à cette Église plus de mal que ne lui en a fait Luther, en philosophie comme en théologie, la norme de l’enseignement de l’Église est la doctrine de saint Thomas d’Aquin. L’une ou l’autre de ces propositions pouvait être vraie, elles ne pouvaient être vraies toutes à la fois.”
appropriate name of God, and about what it means, we must affirm that Aquinas changed few of his doctrines. However, quieting Aquinas’ mind into stasis, on this basis, would require severe abstractions of form from content and of meaning from context. Fixing his thinking by such means would return us, in effect, to manual scholasticism.

In order to consider how Aquinas does change his mind a very great deal, I want to discuss with you this evening what happens to the auctoritates, particularly, Aristotle and the Platonists, in Thomas’ dialectical teaching, especially after he has new or revised translations of Aristotle done from the Greek, rather than through the Arabic mediation, and first time translations from Greek into Latin of the Greek commentators and Proclus. This is Aquinas’ “new” Aristotle.

AUGUSTINE OR ARISTOTLE?

One doctrinal change was recognised very early (about 1280) and continued to be acknowledged afterwards. It is Thomas’ important stepwise acceptance that knowledge involves the analogous formation of a Plotinian - Augustinian inner word (verbum interius) in minds, created and divine. This change makes a great difference for how humans know the Trinity and become deiform. Scholars agree in tracing a development from the early Commentary on the Sentences through the Disputed Questions on Truth to the last redaction of the Summa contra Gentiles and the Prima Pars of the Summa theologiae. Significantly, however, the question among them is as to whether Aquinas was coming more under Augustinian theological influence or, whether, on the contrary, he was working out more radically the implications of an Aristotelian account of knowing. The import of his diverse positions, their significance for the balance in his teaching of revelation and reason, grace and nature, questions of what Thomas read and how he read it, and of when he wrote his various works are wrapped up with judgments about how he stands to the ancient and mediaeval philosophical schools and theological traditions. Thus, a Dutch scholar concludes:

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10 For one view of these see see my God in Himself, 133–35.

His elaboration of Aristotle’s cognitive theory constitutes a radical innovation, going beyond Aristotle himself...Aquinas reconciles Augustinian theological heritage with an Aristotelian position, to the benefit of both.\(^\text{12}\)

**AUGUSTINE AND ARISTOTLE OR DIONYSIUS AND PROCLUS**

At about same time that Aquinas had completed his change of mind on the mental word, he was working on his *Exposition of the Divine Names of Dionysius*. In part of it he used William of Moerbeke’s translation of Aristotle’s *Categories* (finished in March 1266) which went with his translation of the commentary of Simplicius on the same.\(^\text{13}\) The *Exposition* is the first of the long list of commentaries on non-Scriptural, Aristotelian and pseudo-Aristotelian books which Aquinas undertook in the wake of William of Moerbeke’s new translations, or revisions of the translations, of Aristotle, of Greek commentators on Aristotle, and of Proclus. Scholars frequently note the dependence of Aquinas’ *Exposition of the De Anima* on Moerbeke’s translation of Themistius’ annotated paraphrase of the same work finished on the 22\(^{\text{nd}}\) of November 1267,\(^\text{14}\) and the temporal coincidence between Aquinas on the *De Anima* and his treatise on human nature in the *Summa theologiae*.\(^\text{15}\) However, the sequence in which Moerbeke’s translation of Simplicius precedes the *Exposition of the Divine Names*, and the overlap in time and place of the beginning of the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa*, are less noticed.\(^\text{16}\) Yet one of their effects may be a profoundly important change not only in ‘Thomas’ theology but in that of the Latin West generally. This is the separation of the *de deo uno* (qq. 3–26) from the *de deo trino* (qq. 27–43) within Thomas’ treatise *de deo* in the *Summa Theologicae* and his placing the *de deo uno* first. Thomas is said to be the originator of this fundamental structural determinant of the *de deo* and it appears for the first time there.\(^\text{17}\) Further, while it has been maintained either (or both!) that Augustinian or Aristotelian rationalism underlies his division and ordering of the treatise, Thomas is explicit that he finds this distinction, and the reason for beginning from the divine as one and good, in Dionysius, and that no reduction of theology to philosophical reason is involved.

Dionysius said that he separated the consideration of the undifferentiated and the

\(^{12}\) Goris, “Theology and Theory of the Word,” 78.


\(^{16}\) Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas: Volume 1*, 333, 426, 346, 434.

differentiated names into distinct treatises. Thomas also learns from Dionysius that “nnnum habet rationem principii.” Further, following Dionysius, he begins his own de deo uno, which clearly takes the On the Divine Names as a model, with perfection and goodness—which immediately follow simplicity. By a Neoplatonic logic, following the one Dionysius derived from Proclus, which circles upon itself, having begun it with simplicity, Aquinas concludes the first section of the de deo uno with God’s unity. Moreover, the logic by which Aquinas will treat the procession of creatures after the procession of the Divine Persons because they all act together in creation, he also finds in the Divine Names.

There are three elements of interest to us here. First, scholars divide about who Aquinas is following, so the changes are again at least partly about the characterisation of the players in his philosophical theology and their relations to one another. Second, we begin to see the role his commentaries, undertaken when he has Moerbeke’s translations, play on his thinking. Third, Aristotle keeps altering his character: in one movement, he is philosophical reason against Augustinian piety, contrastingly, in the other, Augustine and Aristotle are united when theology is infected by rationalism. In the next change we shall consider, Aquinas himself moves Dionysius, Augustine, Plato and Aristotle in relation to one another.

DIONYSIUS THE ARISTOTELIAN

Another kind of change of Thomas’ mind is indubitable. We see it in his representation of Dionysius’ philosophical affiliation. In his Sentences Commentary, when determining whether the heavens are of the same elemental nature as the inferior creation, Thomas observed that, before Aristotle, all thought they were identical. After him, “because of the efficacy of his reasons,” philosophers agreed and everyone followed Aristotle’s opinion. “Similarly the expositors of sacred Scripture differed on this matter, according as they were followers of the different philosophers by whom they were educated in philosophical matters.” Thus Basil and Augustine and many of the saints follow the opinion of Plato “in philosophical matters which do not regard the faith. Dionysius, however, almost everywhere follows Aristotle, as is clear to those who diligently look into his books.”

18 Aquinas, In librum Beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio, ed. C. Pera (Turin/ Rome: Marietti, 1950), II, i, §110, p. 38, §121, p. 40, §§126-127, pp. 40–41, II, l. 2, §141, p. 46. It is not important that there is considerable doubt as to whether Dionysius wrote the Theological Representations, Aquinas thought he had.

19 Aquinas, In librum Beati Dionysii, II, ii, §143, p. 46. See also, II, ii, §135, p. 45.


21 Aquinas, In librum Beati Dionysii, II, ii, §153, p. 48 and ST I.45.6 “Whether to create is proper to any person?”, “On the contrary, Dionysius says (Div. Nom. ii) that all things caused are the common work of the whole Godhead.”

22 Aquinas, In Quatuor Libros Sententiarum, vol. 1 (of 8), S. Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia, ed. R. Busa (Stuttgart / Bad Cannstatt 1980) lib. 2, dist. 14, quest. 1, art. 2, 164. The online version is as follows: Super Sent., lib. 2 d. 14 q. 1 a. 2 co. Respondeo dicendum, quod circa hanc quaestionem fuit philosophorum diversa positio. Omnes enim ante Aristotelem posuerunt, caelum esse de natura quattuor elementorum. Aristoteles autem primus hanc positionem sequens dixit, quod caelum non est de natura quattuor elementorum sed est quintum corpus. Generally in this paper I use the online Corpus Thomisticum Latin text, recognize as instructo Enrique Alarcón automato electronico Pamplonae ad Universitatis Studiorum Navarrensis aedes a MM A.D. I indicate when I am using another edition.
Despite the riches of this answer in respect to Aquinas’ view of Aristotle, the philosophical schools, the relation between philosophical argument and general opinion, and the relations between philosophy and Christian theology, we are not told what, besides much inspection of the Dionysian corpus, inspired his “almost everywhere” judgment.23

About a decade later, in his Exposition of the De divinis nominibus, Aquinas exhibits an altered view and an important advance in his knowledge of Platonism. He discerns how “one” functions as principle of everything. In the same section of the Exposition where he used the new translation of Aristotle, he lists “five modes in which one has the nature (ratio) of principle” and identifies two of them as coming from Plato.24 His understanding of the subordination of all to the First Principle in Platonism will keep growing and, among other important consequences, will change his view of Plato. In later works, he will unite Plato to Aristotle—and conform Aristotle to Plato—in teaching that God creates ex nihilo. Now, earlier, in the Premium to his Exposition, Aquinas discerns something else about Platonism which will endure, increase in importance, and be crucial to the conciliation of Plato and Aristotle. He sees that the Dionysian “way of speaking” and style, which he characterises as “obscure”, were those used by the Platonists. This is far from being a condemnation and points to another possible concordance. Platonistic reasoning by way of separated abstractions is “neither consonant with the faith nor the truth”, when used in respect to natural things, on these Aristotle is always right for Aquinas. In contrast, when Platonists “spoke of the First Principle of things they are most true and consonant with Christian faith.” Thus, Dionysius is right to speak about God in terms of “goodness, or super-goodness or the principally good, or the goodness of all good.”25 In later works, following Simplicius, he will tell us that obscure and poetic speech is both Platonic and suitable to theology, but that Aristotle and his followers interpret and refute him as if he were speaking literally. While Thomas will normally side with Aristotle in the literal dispute, nonetheless, room is left for a concord should letter be replaced by intention.26

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23 This has not prevented my guessing that the doctrinal likenesses, acknowledged by Aquinas and modern scholars between the Dionysian corpus and the Liber de causis, and Dionysius’ Iamblichan -Proemian view of how we know which bears more resemblance to Aquinas’ Aristotle than to his Plato are at play. See for example, my “Thomas’ Neoplatonic Histories: His following of Simplicius,” Dionysius 20 (2002): 153–178 at 163–4 and “Aquinas, Plato, and Neo-Platonism” for The Oxford Handbook to Aquinas edited by Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) in press.

24 Aquinas, In librum Dei Dionysii, XIII, ii §981, p. 364.

25 Aquinas, In librum Dei Dionysii, proemium §2, pp. 1–2.

In the *Disputed Questions on Spiritual Creatures*, which shows Aquinas’ reading of both Themistius and Simplicius, he reaffirmed his earlier placing of Augustine within the Platonic tradition. Thomas judged: “Augustine followed Plato as much as the Catholic faith would allow.”²⁷ He borrowed from the commentary of Simplicius *On the Categories* to explain the differences between the Platonic and the Aristotelian philosophical procedures. When asking whether the spiritual substance, which is the human soul, is united to the body through a medium, he has Dionysius, John Damascene, Augustine, Peter Lombard, Averroes, lots of diverse Aristotle, and others in the *sic et non*. Thomas’ Aristotelian hylomorphism, for which he warred against the Augustinians at great risk, is at stake.²⁸ Before he determined the matter “according to the true principles of philosophy which Aristotle considered”,²⁹ Thomas places the opinions within a schema. He explains:

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*.³⁰

All depends upon whether abstractions exist separately and whether human reason can move down from them.

About six years into his work on the non-Scriptural commentaries, when he wrote the last question of his *Disputed Questions on Evil*, Aquinas put Augustine and Dionysius together. In a series of replies to objections, he first judges that Augustine spoke about the bodies of demons “as they seemed to some learned persons, that is the Platonists.” According to the logic he took from Simplicius, Thomas goes on in the second reply to both affirm and correct the Platonists on how we know, and, in the third, he declares the philosophical allegiance of the Areopagite: “Dionysius was a follower of the judgments of the Platonists for the most part.”³¹ Two or three years later, in his *Exposition on the Liber de Causis*, which depends on his reading of Moerbeke’s 1268 translation of Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*, Thomas decides both that its author “seems to follow the judgment of Dionysius” and that Aristotle, the Catholic faith, Dionysius, and his equally Proclean and Plotinian Arabic author are frequently in accord.³² The *Treatise on Separate Substances*, written at the

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²⁹ Aquinas, *de Spiritualibus Creaturis*, 3, p. 42, lines 351–52: *secundum nera philosophie principia que consideravit Aristotiles.*

³⁰ Aquinas, *de Spiritualibus Creaturis*, 3, p. 40, lines 275–282: *Harum autem duarum opinionum diversitas ex hoc procedit quod quidam ad inquirendum veritatem de natura rerum processerunt ex rationibus intelligibilibus et hoc fuit proprium Platonicerum, quidam vero ex rebus sensibilibus et hoc fuit proprium philosophie Aristotilis ut dicit Simplicius in Commento super Praedicamenta.* Aquinas is referring to Simplicius, *In Prædictamenta Aristotelis*, Prologus (Pattin: vol. 1, prologus, 8, line 70–9, line 85.)

³¹ Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Malo*, ed. Fratrum Pracdictatorum, Commissio Leonina, vol. 23 (Rome/Paris, 1982), 16.1 ad 1, ad 2, and ad 3, p. 283. In the ad 3 we have “Dionisius qui in plurimis fuit sectator sententiae Platonicer.”

same time, combines a progressive history of philosophy with a complementary concordance of Aristotle and Platonism to serve establishing the truth about the immaterial substances who are the instruments of revelation and providence.

The movements I have traced exhibit that, for Aquinas from the beginning, there is an intimate relation between philosophy and Christian theology. Philosophical positions and ways of reason can be both false and contrary to the faith, and some of the saints follow dangerous philosophical roads. However, a philosophical way with true principles and convincing reasoning is available. After the Greek commentators help him to better understand its dynamic, he will become able to show how philosophy has a shape in which thought is compelled towards truth. He will do this after the manner of Aristotle, but the Stagirite will be read within a much more extensive and generous Neoplatonic vision of the history of philosophy than was his own. Because most of Thomas’ guides will be either Neoplatonic commentators on Aristotle or, if Arabic Peripatetics, have reconciled Proclus and Aristotle, 33 philosophical truth for Aquinas will involve an embrace by Aristotle of his teacher which was beyond the Philosopher’s own grasp. What impels the philosophical commentaries devoted to understanding, clarifying, expositing, and testing this true path has appeared. These stories show something else as well: how philosophical positions transmute, interchange and complement one another in Thomas’ thinking.

HOW THOMAS USES AUTHORITIES: DIONYSIUS WITH ARISTOTLE

As to the transmutation, consider that the first identification of Dionysius as a follower of Aristotle was associated with his views on celestial spirits and celestial bodies, next, a style and way of reasoning and speaking moved him in the opposite direction towards identification among the followers of Plato. Finally, under the influence, or at least the authority of Simplicius, the choice of the opposed points from which knowing begins became the criterion for placement in a philosophical sect. Here, however, a problem arises: his two leading Christian followers of Plato use opposed starting points. Thomas’ casting of the positions of his authorities so that they complement or transmute one another in order to move the argument towards the right determination is illustrated by a complex case which I hope to explain simply. 34 One of the uses of the case is to remind us that Thomas and his contemporaries are swimming in a sea of misidentified texts.


34 More complete explications will be found in my “Magis...Pro Nostra Sentencia’: John Wyclif, his mediæval Predecessors and reformed Successors, and a pseudo-Augustinian Eucharistic Decretal,” Augustiniana 45: 3-4 (1995): 213–245 and my “Reading Augustine through Dionysius: Aquinas’ correction of one Platonism by another,” Aquinas the Augustinian, Chapter 10, 243–257.
In one of these, Aquinas finds attributed to Augustine a text by Lanfranc in which the body of Christ in the Eucharist is a sacrament of itself; thus, an invisible thing is sacrament of another invisible reality. This contradicts genuine statements of Augustine well-known to Aquinas, most famously “A sacrament is a visible form of invisible grace.”

Because Bonaventure allowed intellectual intuition for humans, he used an Augustinian view of human knowing to arrive at a doctrine of the sacraments which contradicted the genuine texts of Augustine, for the sake of the texts falsely ascribed to him. Aquinas did the opposite. For the sake of brevity, I skip over how he treated in his Sentences Commentary what Lombard rightly signalled as a troublesome text and move directly to the Summa theologiae where he, not Lombard, arranges the authorities.

By the fourth article of the question “On Sacraments”, “Whether a sacrament is always a sensible thing?” Aquinas has established only that a sacrament is a sign of a sacred thing inasmuch as through it humans are sanctified. The question of its sensibility remains unsettled. Augustine’s authority is prominent but, as in the previous articles, Aquinas places him on both sides of the question. Crucially, Aquinas’ philosophical authority for understanding the relevant logic is Aristotle, and the determining sacred authority is Dionysius. This is not the only place where Dionysius’ Iamblichan-Proclean Platonism is used in such a context as an authority for the necessity of the human turn to sensible sacraments. In his Sentences Commentary, Dionysius had been cited to the effect that knowing by way of the sensible is our natural way of cognition. Near the end of his life, in his Exposition of John’s Gospel, Dionysius will reappear. A sensible sign is necessary to the sacrament of regeneration because “as Dionysius says, the divine wisdom orders everything so that each is provided for according to its own condition.” Humanity is “cognoscitivus” and “the natural mode of this kind of cognition is that spiritual things should be known through sensible things, because all our knowing begins from sense.”

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35 “Signum est enim res præter speciem, quam ingerit sensibus, alid aliud quicunque faciens in cognitionem venire”, De doctrina Christiana 2.1.1 (CCLSL 32, 32) is found at Lanfranc, de Corp. et Sang., cap. 12, PL 150, 422 B-C; Gratian, Decretum, pars 3, de cons., dist. 2, cap. 33 (ed. Friedberg, vcl. i, p. 1324); Lombard, Sententiae in IV Libris Distinctae, 2 vol. (Grottaferrata, 1981), lib. 4, dist. 1, quest. 3, vol. ii, p. 233; Aquinas, Scriptum super Sententiae Magistri Petri Lombardi, ed. M. F. Moos, 4 vol., iv (Paris, 1947), lib. 4 dist. 1 quest. 1 art. 1, quaestiones 3, arg. 1; ST 3.60.1 obj. 2. A similar list could be given for “Sacrificium ergo visibile invisibilis sacrificii sacramentum, id est sacrum signum est”, De Civitate Dei, 10.5 (CCSL 47, 277). There is an important bibliographical note at p. 232 of Volume 2 of the Grottaferrata edition of Lombard’s Sententiae (1981).

36 Sacramentum est invisibilis gratae visibilis forma” is equally well distributed. It becomes the standard definition and derives from Augustine, Epistola 105.3.12 (CSEL 34, 604). There are references at Gratian Decretum, pars 3, de cons., dist. 2, cap. 32 (ed. Friedberg, vol. i, p. 1324); Lombard, Sententiae, lib. 4, dist. 1, quest. 2 and lib. 4, dist. 8, quest. 6 (Grottaferrata, vol. ii, pp. 232 and 284).

37 Aquinas, ST 3.60.4: Est autem homini connaturale ut per sensibilium perveniat in cognitionem intelligibilium. Signum autem est quod aliquid deest in cognitionem alterius. Unde, cum res sacrarum quae per sacramenta significantur, sint quaedam spiritualia et intelligibilia bona quibus homo sanctificatur, conceptum est ut per aliquas res sensibles significati sacramentum impletur, sicut etiam per simuladonem sensibilium rerum in divina Scriptura res spiritualia nobis describentur. Est inde quod ad sacramenta requiratur res sensibles, et utiam Dionysius probat, in I cap. caelestis hierarchiae. Aristotle appears in obj. 1 and the ad 1.

The authority of Augustine’s authentic texts cannot settle the question as to whether something sensible is essential to a sacrament. In the Summa theologiae question, he is correctly represented in opposed ways. He thinks both that sensible things are the least of things “without which humans are able to live well”, and also that sacraments involve a physical element and the coming of the divine Word.\(^\text{39}\) Thus the matter turns rather on the question of human nature. If humans have intellectual intuition, then they do not need sensible signs to lead them to the holy. Augustine and his followers, as heirs of the Plotinian divided soul whose true reality is in NOUS, allow for an intellectual intuition independent of sensation. Dionysius is Aquinas’ source for the other Neoplatonic tradition cohering with what he learns from Aristotle. For it, because the individual soul is entirely descended into the realm of becoming, humans cannot come to the divine except through the sensible. And so, signs which would lead us must be sensible, not because signs are by nature sensible, but rather because what God would use to make us holy must be adapted to our condition. By this route Thomas affirms a genuine text of Augustine, which appeared at the beginning of the question: “And hence what are principally called signs are what are offered to the senses, as Augustine says in the second book of De doctrina Christiana.”\(^\text{40}\) Augustine’s definition is saved from its reversal by Lanfranc through an Aristotelian and Dionysian philosophical anthropology, opposed to his own—or, perhaps better, one of, or part of his own. In common with mediaeval Latins from Eriugena on who knew both Neoplatonic traditions, Aquinas unites Augustine with Dionysius, but in the marriage he arranged Dionysian rules because he provides the dominant logical structure.\(^\text{41}\) Further, because he held that Aristotle had “the true principles of philosophy”,\(^\text{42}\) and because of his determination to work out where they led, Aristotle gave a special twist and a greater weight to the Proclean Dionysius,

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\(^{39}\) Aquinas, ST 3.60.4 obj. 3: res sensibles sunt minima bona sine quibus homo recte vivere potest and s.c.: Augustinus dicit super Ioan: “Accedit verbum ad elementum, et fit sacramentum.”

\(^{40}\) Aquinas, ST 3.60.4 ad 1: Effectus autem sensibilis per se habet quod ducat in cognitionem alterius, quasi primo et per se homini innotescens, quia omnis nostra cogitatio a sensu oritur. Effectus autem intelligibiles non habent quod possint ducere in cognitionem alterius nisi inquantum sunt per alium manifestati, idest per aliqua sensibili. Et inde est quod primo et principaliter dicuntur signa quae sensibils efferrnatur: sicut Augustinus dicit in II De doctrina Christiana, ubi dicit quod “signum est enim res praeeter speciem, quam ingerit sensibus, facit aliquid alio in cognitionem venire.” Effectus autem intelligibiles non habent rationem signi nisi secundum quod sunt manifestati per aliqua signa. Et per bunc etiam modum quaedam quae non sunt sensibils, dicuntur quandomodo sacramenta, inquantum sunt significata per aliqua sensibili,…


\(^{42}\) Aquinas, de Spiritualibus Creaturis 3, p. 42, lines 351-52.
who had for Aquinas the authority of Paul’s convert on the Areopagus and of the repository of apostolic spiritual wisdom.43

**How Thomas Composes His Mind**

In common with his contemporaries, almost all of Aquinas’ doctrines are responses within variously formed disputations.44 This rule applies even to his philosophical commentaries, not only because of the mini disputations he often stages within them, but also because he is deciding between inherited or newly known competing interpretations.45 In the disputations, Aquinas has markedly different degrees of control both over the questions and over which authorities, arguments, and positions define what and who are at issue. To turn his determinations into fixed doctrines, they must be abstracted from their questions formed by the *sic et non* opposition of the *auctoritates*.

Several dynamics are at play in Thomas’ disputatiously formed teaching. He complains in his prologue to the *Summa theologiae* that the prevailing scholastic structures impeded beginning students by a “multiplication of useless questions, articles and arguments”. However, when he decides the order of the questions and the play of authorities within them, as in this *Summa*, we find not only innovation but also that out of each precariously balanced answer new questions arise. Frequently, the responses to the objections in the disputation, thus the way authorities are accommodated (what usually happens), or their positions refuted, push the argument to the new question.46 Although the *Summa*’s planned *mone, proodus, epistrophe* structure would have made it complete in two senses, because it both returns to the beginning and passes through all the kinds of reality, the internal process is, in principle, endless. As a matter of fact, Aquinas not only did not finish the work but had also moved on from some of its determinations before he died. In any case, for *disputatio*, how the authorities are understood and used keeps being modified—often because the modification enables the accommodation. Thus, the *auctoritates*, whose conflicts forced Hellenic, Jewish, Christian and Islamic scholastic theology into being, are not themselves stable. They acquire their characters in two ways. On the one hand, as actors in the drama of the disputation, either placed where they are and how they appear by Aquinas for his purposes, very often on both sides of a question, or imposed by disputants outside his control, or fixed in the question by its history and circumstances, they change roles in the on-going *sic et non*.

On the other hand, Aquinas may change his mind about their positions in virtue of something he newly comes to see or know. We observe this mutation of his characters at work most clearly in *lectio*, the public reading of texts. His commentaries provide examples of such reading. Indeed, some of them are reports by the auditors of lectures; several corrected


46 I tried to exhibit how this happens in respect to some questions in *God in Himself*. For some bad advice on how to read a Thomistic question, despite his correct view of the role of the objections and the replies to them, see Thomas Aquinas, *The Treatise on Human Nature: Summa Theologiae 1a 75–89*, trans. Robert Pasnau (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002), xix–xx.
by Aquinas. Others employ the form, but seem to have been composed outside the lecture hall. His philosophical commentaries belong within the immensely long and diverse commentary tradition, primarily, in his case, as it was received, developed, and practiced in the Faculty of Arts in Paris—‘the city of philosophers’ (as Albertus Magnus put it).  

Besides receiving the Greek commentators through the Latins: Boethius, Macrobius, and Calcidius, Thomas had them, as the Parisian artisans did, especially, but by no means exclusively, through the commentaries of Averroes. Avicenna, Averroes, and Maimonides, and the other inhabitants of the Arabic philosophical world whose works and views were known to Aquinas and his contemporaries, had been educated by Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus, and the late ancient Greek commentators. They had them in Arabic owing to the translation project of the Abbasid caliphs which, though distinct from the pre-Islamic Syrian translation from Greek to Syriac, used Syriac intermediaries. Aquinas’ Latin versions showed the damage they had suffered in their mediation from Greek into Syriac, from Syriac into Arabic and from Arabic, by an often linguistically complex process, into Latin. Because of William of Moerbeke’s efforts, begun in 1260 with Alexander of Aphrodisias On Aristotle’s Meteorology, Aquinas would lay his hands on some of the same works by Alexander, Themistius, Simplicius, and Proclus which had formed Arabic philosophy, now translated directly from the Greek. To understand his hermeneutical situation, we must remember that he is often confronting the use of a Greek commentary by an Arabic intermediary with his new Latin translation of the same. Getting back behind the Arabs, higher up the spring to the ancient sources themselves, excited him greatly, and we cannot doubt that the arrival of Moerbeke’s translations is part of what motivated his commentaries. There are ironies in the fact that in his desire to get back to the Greeks generally, and to a pristine Aristotle especially, he shared the spirit of Averroes.  


51 See, for example, Gauthier’s learned notes in Aquinas, Sententia libri de Anima, I, vii, p. 38 at lines 3-13 and II, I, p. 68 at lines 68-69.

52 See the amusing account by Gauthier, in Aquinas, Expositio libri Peryermenias, 81*-84*.

53 Gutas, Greek Thought, 153.
The twentieth-century’s greatest editor of Aquinas, Père René-Antoine Gauthier, O.P., judged that Moerbeke’s translations of the Greek commentators were more important for the special quality of Thomas’ expositions than were his translations of Aristotle. 54 My lecture is a vindication and expansion of this particular judgment in which he does not mention Moerbeke’s Simplicius On the Categories, which, together with his Themistius De Anima, helped push Aquinas from doxographer to historian of philosophy after the Aristotelian and Platonic modes.55

Certainly Thomas’ Exposition of the Book of Causes depends entirely for his change of mind about its author, and for most of its content, on Moerbeke’s translation of Proclus’ Elements of Theology. Together with his colleagues at Paris, where the Liber was on the University list of the books of Aristotle for lecture, he had supposed for most of his working life that the Liber was the cap of Aristotle’s system; the propositions, if not perhaps the commentary on them, being by The Philosopher.56 From the beginning of his writing, neoplatonic philosophical principles: “every secondary cause is only a cause through the primary cause”, “a thing is known according to the mode of the knower”, “what knows its essence has complete return upon itself”, “the first of created things is esse” were derived from it and credited to the Philosopher. The distance between Thomas and ourselves is exhibited in his lack of embarrassment when unmasking his own deception.

On the one hand, there is little apparent change. After his prologue puts Aristotle together with the Gospel of John to justify pursuing knowledge of the first causes, Thomas identifies the Liber as excerpted by Arab philosophers from the Elements. After his Exposition, he did not use the Liber as an authority again. This is not, however, because he rejected the philosophical principles he had imbibed, nor, because, like Albertus Magnus, he was too attached to the Arabic Peripatetic-Neoplatonic amalgam it capped to admit that it was not by The Philosopher.


55 Moreover, Gauthier and others extend the list of Greek commentaries and philosophical treatises he came to know still further. See, for example, on Boethius, Gauthier in Aquinas, Expositio libri Peryermenias, 49*-50* and 81*-82*; in respect to Gerard of Cremona’s translation of Alexander of Aphrodisias’ De intellectu et intellecto, see Alain de Libera, L’Unité de l’intellect: Commentaire du De unitate intellectus contra averroistas de Thomas d’Aquin (Paris: Vrin, 2004), 39.


57 In the Ethics, the Parts of Animals, and the Metaphysics.
On the other hand, after pointing to the facts that the *Liber* was a translation from the Arabic, and did not exist in Greek, he painstakingly located the sources of the *Liber* in the *Elements*, which he notes was translated from the Greek, and works out how Proclus had been both adopted and modified. He compares Proclus, as the acme of Platonism, to the Dionysian *corpus*, the *Liber*\(^58\), Aristotle and Christian faith. With this addition to his knowledge of the Greek fount of philosophy, he continued more sure-footedly and determinedly with the conciliation of Platonism and Aristotle for the sake of truth, philosophical and religious. This was the project, conscious or unconscious, explicit or implicit, of most of the commentators he knew, including Averroes.

For example, from Averroes, Thomas derived one of its results which he would use early and often, “the motionless motion” which God can have so that he is appropriately called living.\(^59\) It originates from interpreting a passage of the *De Anima* probably intended to oppose the notion of the soul as self-moving in Plato through that very idea.\(^60\) In the *Sentences Commentary* and other early works, Aquinas 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.\(^61\)

**CONSEQUENCES OF CHANGING YOUR MIND ON ARISTOTLE**

It seems then that most of what is new in Thomas as philosopher is related to the ways in which his authorities are set in relation to one another. Crucial are how Aristotle and Platonism are mutually defined and connected and, in this connection, how the coherence of philosophy with Christian faith can be identified and the boundaries of that faith can be reconsidered. A telling instance of such change took place through his new detailed study of the texts, encouraged by the Moerbeke translations. This involves the question of the eternity of the world and the related questions of the *creatio ex nihilo* and who taught it. Thomas begins in the *Commentary on the Sentences* with the same position on three points as

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\(^{59}\) I have written a good deal about this, perhaps too much given that part of Michael Chase’s criticism of a particular of my treatment in “Aquinas and the Platonists” *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages: A Doxographic Approach*, edited by Stephen Gersh and Maarten J.F.M. Hoenen, with the assistance of Pieter Th. van Wingerden (Berlin – New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2002), 279–324 at 300–306, seems correct. See M. Chase, “The Medieval Posterity of Simplicius’ Commentary on the *Categories*,” his “reserves” are at 20–23 and concern the positions of Iamblichus and Simplicius. For the role of motionless motion in Thomas’ doctrine of God, see *my God in Himself*, 103–106.


\(^{61}\) Aquinas, *Super Sent.*, lib. i 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 proprio non sunt motus sed operations. 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 dicitus, quod finis movet efficientem. V el dicendum, quod movet se in creaturarum productione*, ut dictum est, hac dict., quest. 1, art. 1. and see 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 (Leonine edition, vol. 22, part 3, p. 654).
Moses Maimonides, to whom he referred twice in the article in which he determined the matter, even if on a crucial point he is following Latin theologians and invoked “Gregory.”

Their common positions are: 1) the eternity of the world cannot be demonstrated, 2) Aristotle knew that his arguments for it were only probable, 3) the doctrine that creation has a temporal beginning cannot be demonstrated either. He follows Maimonides in teaching that the temporal beginning is to be believed as taught by prophecy, not demonstrated, reproducing his position in both reasoning and content. With him, and against so-called Augustinians like Bonaventure, Aquinas judges that the endeavour of theologians to claim necessity for what cannot be demonstrated only serves to bring contempt on the faith and to undermine trust in the rational demonstrations on which divine science does and must rely.

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Differently from Aquinas, Maimonides knows, as Shlomo Pines tells us, that “the doctrine of the kalam was originally taken over … from Christian doctors, who wrote in Greek or Syriac”, and that Philoponus is at the origins of this dialectical theology. Thomas never gets Philoponus’ diverse positions straight—not altogether surprising because he derives so much of what he knows of him from the contemptuously opposed Simplicius. He is acquainted with Philoponus both by his name among the Arabs, “John the Grammarian”, and as “Philoponus”, receiving arguments from the two opposed sides of this importantly transitional figure: the Neoplatonist conciliator, on the one hand, and the Christian rejecter of the pagan concordance in Contra Proclum, on the other. Significantly, for the sake of a doctrine of the temporal beginning of creation, Aquinas does not reject the late ancient and Arabic concordance of the two philosophers who he believes, following Simplicius and others, determine the fundamental positions of philosophy. Instead he unites Plato and Aristotle to support the doctrine of creation from nothing.

Maimonides divides Plato and Aristotle on creation: Plato is more compatible with scriptural revelation on the temporal beginning, but no compromise with Aristotle on this question is possible. Aquinas differs. The difference has three elements. First, Aquinas

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68 Moses Maimonides, The Guide of the Perplexed, trans. with Introduction and Notes by S. Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. exxvi and I, 71: “You should also know that whatever the Mohammedans, that is, the Mu’tazilah and the Ashaariyah, said on those subjects, consists in nothing but theories founded on propositions which are taken from the works of those Greek and Syrian scholars who attempted to oppose the system of the philosophers, and to refute their arguments. The following was the cause of that opposition: At the time when the Christian Church brought the Greeks and Syrians into its fold, and promulgated its well-known dogmas, the opinions of the philosophers were current amongst those nations: and whilst philosophy flourished, kings became defenders of the Christian faith. The learned Greek and Syrian Christians of the age, seeing that their dogmas were unquestionably exposed to severe attacks from the existing philosophical systems, laid the foundation for this science of Dogmatics: they commenced by putting forth, such propositions as would support their doctrines, and be useful for the refutation of opinions opposed to the fundamental principles of the Christian religion. When the Mohammedans caused Arabic translations of the writings of the Philosophers to be made, those criticisms were likewise translated. When the opinions of John the Grammarian, of Ibn Adi, and of kindred authors on those subjects were made accessible to them, they adopted them, and imagined that they had arrived at the solution of important problems.”

69 Among many representations of Philoponus in this exposition we have Aquinas opposing him in order to reconcile Plato and Aristotle on creation, In de Caelo, I, vi, §§60-61, pp. 29–30: Sciendum est autem circa primum, quod quidam posuerunt corpus caelestis esse generaliter et corruptibili semper semper, sicut Ioannes grammaticus, qui dictus est Philoponus. Et ad suum intentionem adducenturus, primo utitur auctoritate Platonis, qui posuit caelum esse genitum et totum mundum. Secundo inducit talem rationem. Omnis virtus corporis finita est finita, ut probatur in V Physic.: sed virtus finita non potest se extendere ad durationem infinitam (unde per virtutem finitam non potest aliquid moveri tempore infinito, ut ibidem probatur): ergo corpus caeleste non habebit virtutem ut sit infinitum tempore. Tertio obiicit sic. In omni corpore naturali est materia et privatio, ut patet ex I Physic.: sed ubicumque est materia cum privatione, est potestia ad corruptionem ergo corpus caeleste est corruptibile. Si quis autem dicat quod non est caelestia materia caelestium corporum et inferiorum, obiicit in contrario: quia secundum hoc oportet quod materiam esse compositam, ex eo scilicet quod est commune utrique materiae, et ex eo quod facit diversitatem inter materias. Sed haec necessitatem non habent. Quod enim Plato posuit caelum genitum, non intellecit ex hoc quod est generationis subjectum, quod Aristoteles hic negare intendit: sed quod necesse est ipsum habere esse ab aliqua superiori causa, utpote multitudinem et distensionem in suis partibus habere; per quod significatur esse eius a primo uno causari, a quo oportet omnem multitudinem causari. At In de Caelo, I, viii, Aquinas defends Aristotle against the uncomprehending John the Grammarian: §86, p. 41: Obiicit autem contra hoc Ioannes grammaticus, … Sed in hoc deficiit ab intellectu Aristotelis. Non enim hoc intendit Aristoteles…

70 Maimonides, Guide, II, 25 (Pines, p. 330): For if creation in time had been demonstrated—if only as Plato understands creation—all the incoherent claims made to us on this point by the philosophers would become void. In the same way, if the philosophers would succeed in demonstrating eternity as Aristotle understands it, the Law as a whole would become void, and a shift to other opinions would take place.
argues that philosophical reason demonstrates *creatio ex nihilo*, that is, the production of the whole substance of things, presupposing nothing uncreated, although only faith knows that there was a temporal nothingness before creation.\(^{72}\) Second, always for him, as Averroes explains, Aristotle teaches the *creatio ex nihilo* which philosophy knows—i.e., that there is a cause of the substance of things in their very *esse*.\(^{73}\) Third, in contrast, Plato thinks there are other principles co-eternal with God. In accord with his view in the *Sentences Commentary*, in the early *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, Thomas maintains that, for the Platonists, the divine mind, or intellect, is “a certain inferior substance...full of all the ideas of things” and that this subordination requires that they posited “three first things and principles.”\(^{74}\)

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\(^{72}\) Aquinas, *Super Sent.*, lib. 2 d. 1 q. 1 a. 2 co. Respondo quod creationem esse, non tantum fides tenet, sed etiam ratio demonstrat. Hoc autem creare dicimus, sicut producere rem in esse secundum totam suam substantiam. Unde necessarium est a primo principio omnia per creationem procedere. Scindandum est autem, quod ad rationem creationis pertinent duo. Primum est ut nihil prae sequentur in re quae creari dicitur... causalitas creativis extensit ad omne quid quod est in re; et ideo creatio ex nihilo dicitur esse, quia nihil est quod creationi praecedat, quasi non creatum. Secundum est, ut in re quae creandi dicuntur, prius sit non esse quae esse: non quidem priori tempori vel durationis, ut prius non fuerit et postmodum sit;... Et secundum ista duo creatio dupliciter dicitur esse ex nihilo. Tum ictu quod negativo negat ordinem creationis importat per hunc praepositionem ex, ad aliquid praecedentem, ut dicatur esse ex nihilo, quia non ex alipho praecedent ee; et hoc quantum ad primum. Tum ita quod permanet ordo creationis ad nihil praecedentem, ut affirmatus; ut dicatur creatio esse ex nihilo, quia res creatae naturaliter prius habet non esse quam esse; et si hae duo sufficient ad rationem creationis, sic creatio potest demonstrari, et sic philosophi creationem posuerunt. Si autem accipimus tertium aortere ad rationem creationis, ut sicut etiam duratione res creatae prius non esse quam esse habet, at dicatur esse ex nihilo, quia est tempore post nihil, sic creatio demonstratur non potest, nec a philosophi conceditur, sed per fidem supponitur. See T.B. Noone, *The Originality of St. Thomas’s Position on the Philosophers and Creation*, *The Thomist*, 60 (1996): 275–300 at 295–299.

\(^{73}\) These assertions begin here: Aquinas, *Super Sent.*, lib. 2 d. 1 q. 1 a. 5 ad s. c. 1. *Ad primum ergo dicendum, quod sicat dicit Commentator in Lib. de substantia orbis, Aristotelis nuncuam intendit quod Deus esset causa motus caele tantum, sed etiam quod esset causa substantiae ejus dans sibi idem. Exempli causa creationis, ut scilicet producere rem in esse secundum totam suam substantiam. Unde necessarium est a primo principio omnia per creationem procedere. Scindandum est autem, quod ad rationem creationis pertinent duo. Primum est ut nihil prae sequentur in re quae creari dicitur... causalitas creativis extensit ad omne quid quod est in re; et ideo creatio ex nihilo dicitur esse, quia nihil est quod creationi praecedat, quasi non creatum. Secundum est, ut in re quae creandi dicuntur, prius sit non esse quae esse: non quidem priori tempori vel durationis, ut prius non fuerit et postmodum sit;... Et secundum ista duo creatio dupliciter dicitur esse ex nihilo. Tum ictu quod negativo negat ordinem creationis importat per hunc praepositionem ex, ad aliquid praecedentem, ut dicatur esse ex nihilo, quia non ex alipho praecedent ee; et hoc quantum ad primum. Tum ita quod permanet ordo creationis ad nihil praecedentem, ut affirmatus; ut dicatur creatio esse ex nihilo, quia res creatae naturaliter prius habet non esse quam esse; et si hae duo sufficient ad rationem creationis, sic creatio potest demonstrari, et sic philosophi creationem posuerunt. Si autem accipimus tertium aortere ad rationem creationis, ut sicut etiam duratione res creatae prius non esse quam esse habet, at dicatur esse ex nihilo, quia est tempore post nihil, sic creatio demonstratur non potest, nec a philosophi conceditur, sed per fidem supponitur. See T.B. Noone, *The Originality of St. Thomas’s Position on the Philosophers and Creation*, *The Thomist*, 60 (1996): 275–300 at 295–299.

\(^{74}\) Aquinas, *Super Sent.*, lib. 2 d. 1 q. 1 a. 2 co. Tertius error fuit eorum qui posuerunt agens et materiam, sed agens non esse principium materiae, quanvis sit suum tantum agens: et hoc est opinio Anacagoreae et Platonicis nisi quid Plato superaddidit tertium principium, sicut ideas per intellectum statim, quas exemplaria diceret; et nullum esse causam alterius; sed per hae triba causari mundum, et res ex quibus mundus constat. Aquinas, *Super De Trinitate*, quest. 3, art. 4, resp., p. 115, line 116–p. 116, line 123: quandam inferiorum substantiam... plenum omnium rerum idearum et trigonum principalium. See also ibid., quest. 1, art. 4, ad 8, p. 90, line 163–p.91, line 183; idem, *De articulis Fidei et Ecclesiae sacramento*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Commissione Leonina: vol. 42 (Rome, 1979), p. 246: *error Platonis et Anacagoreae, qui posuerunt mundum factum a Deo, sed ex materia praesacventi*. Idem, ST 1.32.1 ad 1. See V. Boland, *Ideas in God According to Saint...*
Aquinas will change his mind on two matters: 1) firstly, he will come to the conviction that Aristotle believed himself to have demonstrated that the world was eternal, and 2) secondly, that Plato also taught the *creatio ex nihilo*. As a result of the second, he will bring Plato and Aristotle into accord and represent Aristotle’s teaching in Platonic terms using the language of participation.

Thomas continued to maintain the comforting view that Aristotle did not believe he had demonstrated the eternity of the world when he was writing the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa theologiae*. There he nicely summed up the position he held in common with Maimonides as follows:

It is not necessary that the world always exists and it is not possible to demonstrate this. Aristotle’s reasons are relatively, but not simply, demonstrative; their force is limited to contradicting the reasons of some of the ancients who asserted that the world began to exist in some modes which were impossible in reality. This appears in three ways. Firstly, because, both in *Physica* VIII and in *De Caelo* I, he prefaces opinions, for example, of Anaxagoras, Empedocles and Plato, and brings forward reasons to refute them. Secondly, because wherever he speaks of this subject, he quotes the testimony of the ancients, which is not the way of someone demonstrating but persuading. Thirdly, because he expressly says (*Topic. i, 9*), that there are dialectical problems, about which we do not have reasons, for example, “whether the world is eternal.”

Such “a forced concordance between metaphysics and theology” would have drawn the reproach of Siger of Brabant, always an attentive reader, and ultimately a follower, of Thomas. A few years later, in his *Exposition of Aristotle’s Physics*, Thomas dismisses the Maimonidean position which had also been his own with scorn:

These then are the reasons by which Aristotle intended to prove that motion always existed and will never cease….Some, in a vain attempt to show that Aristotle concluded nothing contrary to the faith, have said that Aristotle does not intend here to prove as true that motion is perpetual but to allege reasons for both sides of a question that is doubtful. That this is frivolous is evident to anyone who investigates

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75 Aquinas, ST 1.46.1: *Non est igitur necessarium mundum semper esse. Unde nec demonstrative probari potest. Nec rationes quas ad hoc Aristoteles inducit, sunt demonstrativa simpliciter, sed secundum quid, scilicet ad contradicendum rationibus antiquorum, ponendum mundum incipere secundum quosdam modos in veritate impossibiles. Et hoc apparat ex tribus. Primo quidem, quia tam in VIII Physic. quam in I de caelo, praemittit quasdam opiniones, ut Anaxagorae et Empedocles et Platonis, contra quas rationes contradictorias inducit. Secundo, quia, ubicunque de hac materia loquitur, inducit testimonia antiquorum, quod non est demonstratoris, sed probabiliter persuadentis. Tertio, quia expresse dicit in I Lib. Topic., quod quasdam sunt problemata dialectica, de quibus rationes non habemus, ut trium mundus sit aeternus.*

Aristotle’s procedure here. Moreover, he uses the eternity of time and of motion as a principle to prove the existence of a first principle both here in *Physics* VIII and in *Metaphysics* XII. That shows he considered it proved.\(^77\)

This brings out another difference from Maimonides. Rabbi Moses follows Aristotle’s proof for the existence and incorporeality of the first principle using the eternity of time and motion as an hypothesis, although rejecting it himself.\(^78\) Aquinas did not attempt so convoluted a method. There is a more important issue for us, however. Why the “frivolous”? Does Thomas have a different mode of thinking when he is commenting on a philosophical work according to the norms of the Faculty of Arts and his readers, both critical and admiring, in it, which makes his previous theological procedure problematic? I do not have an answer to this question but it cannot be doubted that the way of proceeding he now scorns was his own used over a long time. In any case, there is more here than a judgment about a matter of fact and John Marenbon argues convincingly that Aquinas changes his mode of reasoning.

Somewhat later in the same Paris milieu where he exposted the *Physics*, in his *On the Eternity of the World*, Aquinas works out the consequences of this change of mind. Doctrinally his position is the same as that which he proposed in 1254 as a Bachelor commenting on the *Sentences*, neither the eternity of the world nor the temporal creation are able to be demonstrated. Nonetheless, according to Gauthier, this little treatise shows signs that Thomas is now personally involved and has much at stake. “The Master of 1270 feels that he has enough authority to criticise and even judge from on high his ‘adversaries’.”\(^79\) *On the Eternity of the World* specifies what on this matter constitutes heresy.

Owing to the position he took in his *Sentences Commentary*, he is caught between Bonaventure and the Franciscans, on the one side, who demand a demonstration of what faith teaches, and the Aristotelians in the Faculty of Arts, on the other, to whose positions he had conceded so much. He begins by assuming: “in accordance with the Catholic faith, that the world had a beginning in time.” Nonetheless, still a question arises “whether the world could have always existed.” In arriving at the truth about this Thomas wants first to “distinguish where we agree with our adversaries and in what we disagree with them.” Continuing but widening his position from his *Sentences Commentary*, for him there is a sharp difference between the questions on the temporal beginning and on creation:

If someone holds that something besides God could have always existed, in the sense that there could be something always existing and yet not made by God, then we differ with him: such an abominable error is contrary not only to the faith but also to the teachings of the philosophers, who confess and prove that everything that in any way exists cannot exist unless it be caused by him who supremely and most truly has existence. However, someone may hold that there has always existed

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\(^77\) Aquinas, *In Physic.* VIII, ii, § 986, pp. 509–510: *Hae igitur rationes sunt, ex quibus Aristoteles probare intendit motum semper fuisse et nunquam deficer;... Quodam vero frustra conantur Aristotelem ostendere non contra fidelem locutum esse, dicentur quod Aristoteles non intendit hic probare quasi verum, quod motus sit perpetuos; sed inducere rationem ad utramque partem, quasi ad rem dubium; quod ex ipso modo procederit frivolum apparet. Et praeterea, perpetuitate temporis et motus quasi principio utilur ad probandum primum principium esse, et hic in octavo et in XII Metaphys.; unde manifestum est, quod supponit hoc tamen probatum.*


\(^79\) Gauthier in Aquinas, *De Aeternitate Mundi*, 54–56 at 55.
something that, nevertheless, had been wholly caused by God, and thus we ought to
determine whether this position is tenable.80

He decides that the notions “having being made” and “never not being” are not
contradictory. 81 John Marenbon outlines what is remarkable in these questions and the
manner in which Aquinas treats them:

Aquinas does not, as in his previous treatments of the issue, discuss the factual
question about what happened and then the second-order issue of our epistemic
access to the answer...He analyses a set of possibilities and, because he is dealing with
questions of pure logical compatibility, he is able to argue demonstratively, although
the area is one where, so far as actual facts are concerned, no demonstrations are
acceptable to him. Moreover, he is keen to emphasise that, in the sort of question he
is considering, to give the wrong answer is not heretical...The argument of the De
aeternitate mundi is bold and brilliant...Yet it can be seen in some ways as a
retrenchment in Aquinas’ position. Rather than consider what can and cannot be
demonstrated about the world as it is, and so discuss the differing competencies of
philosophical reason and revelation, Aquinas turns to questions purely about
possibility, in a way that anticipates the way theologians would commonly work in
the fourteenth century. 82

Part of what pushed Aquinas to this new kind of reasoning was his growing
conviction that the great authorities in philosophy both taught the essentials of creatio ex
nihilo. Plato will join Aristotle. Thomas’ shift begins ambiguously in the early Disputed
Questions on Power. In them, relying on Macrobius, on the one hand, he gives us his former
Plato with two primal separate substances, the Father, and, subordinately, his mind, full of
ideas.83 On the other, in the same work, human knowledge is represented as progressing
from its beginning point among the first philosophers occupied with sensible things. In the
move to the intelligible, on the authority of Augustine, Plato appears with Aristotle and his
followers among the philosophers who arrived at a universal cause of being in agreement
with the Catholic faith. Plato, in searching for the one which is common to a plurality, had
discovered that all derived from unity both in numbers and in natural things.84 The Summa

80 Aquinas, De Aeternitate Mundi, p. 85, lines 1-16: Supposito, secundum fidem Catholicam, quod mundus durationis
initium habuit, dubitationi mota est, utrum potuerit semper fuisse. Cuius dubitationis ut veritas explicetur, prius distinguendum est
in quo cum adversarii convenimus, et quid est illud in quo ab eis differimus. Si enim intelligatur quod aliquid praeter Deum
potuit semper fuisse, quasi possit esse aliquid tamen ab eo non factum: error abominabilis est non solum in fide, sed etiam apud
philosophos, qui confidentur et probant omne quod est quocumque modo, esse non posse nisi sit causatum ab eo qui maxime et
verissime esse habet. Si autem intelligatur aliquid semper fuisse, et tamen causatum fuisse a Deo secundum totum id quod in eo est,
vindicandum est utrum hoc possit stare.

81 Ibid., p. 88, lines 211-213: Sic ergo patet quod in loco quod dicitur, aliquid esse factum et nunquam non fuisse, non est
intellectus aliqua repugnantis.

82 John Marenbon, Medieval Philosophy. An Historical and Philosophical Introduction (London: Routledge, 2007),

83 Aquinas, Quaestiones Disputatae De Potentia, ed. P.M. Pession (Rome/ Turin: Marietti, 1965), 6.6, resp C,
Quaestiones Disputatae vol. ii, p. 174: Plato namque posuit duas substantias separatas, scilicet Deum patrem...et postmodum
mentis ipsius.

84 Ibid., 3.5, p. 49: Postiores vero philosophi, ut Plato, Aristoteles et eorum sequaces, pervenerunt ad considerationem ipsius esse
universalis; et ideo ipsi soli possuerunt aliquid universalis causam rerum, a qua omnia alia in esse prodeunt, ut patet per
Augustinum. Cui quidem sententiae etiam Catholica fides consentit. Est hoc triplici ratione demonstrari potest: quarum prima est
Theologiae is similarly ambiguous. There is a tentative judgement, owed to Lombard and Calcidius, that Plato believed in uncreated first matter, and an opposed judgment, later in the *Prima Pars*, in which he seems to be with Aristotle asserting a universal cause of all being.\(^8^5\)

Thomas’ important rethinking of the *Physics* provided him with certainty on the matter. Again he starts with the first philosophers and finds an advance to the good conclusion in which Plato and Aristotle are explicitly linked:

The first of the philosophers solely considered the causes of accidental mutations, and thought all becoming was alteration. Those who succeeded them arrived at a knowledge of substantial changes, but those who came still later, such as Plato and Aristotle, arrived at a knowledge of the principle of all existence.\(^8^6\)

Thomas’ most completely worked out comparison of what are now the two fountains of philosophical truth about the most important of matters comes a few years later in his treatise on the angels, the *De Substantiis Separatis* of 1272. I must say something about that further on. However, it is already clear that Aquinas thinks within a complex interlocking web of positions and figures and that, when a judgement changes about one of the elements, everyone must be repositioned. It is no wonder that everything in Dante’s Heaven of the Doctors depends upon who is sitting beside whom.\(^8^7\)

**Philosophy as Interpretation**

In his commentaries and treatises like the *De Unitate intellectus* and the *De aeternitate mundi*, Thomas engaged the Parisian “city of philosophy.” He, and his commentaries, were valued there, so much so that at his death the Arts Faculty sent condolences and asked both for some of his unfinished philosophical writings and also for the Latin versions of Simplicius *On the De caelo* and Proclus *On the Timaeus*, he had promised to send them. Commentary was the primary way of doing philosophy and, those from whom he learned this way of philosophizing were by no means passively receptive to the text. To understand what it would have been for Aquinas from the beginnings of his philosophical education, we are helped by Richard Taylor’s judgment that, in the case of Averroes: “philosophical commentaries and distinctly philosophical treatises are meant by him to be for the most part demonstrative works.”\(^8^9\)

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\(^8^5\) Aquinas, *ST* 1.15.3 ad 3 and ad 4 and *ST* 1.44 articles 1 & 2. Johnson, “Aquinas’ Changing Evaluation of Plato on Creation”: 84–87 is crucial to understanding these texts.

\(^8^6\) Aquinas, *In Physic.*, VIII, ii, § 975, p. 506: *Quorum primi consideraverunt causas solanum mutationum accidentalium, ponentes omne fieri esse alterari: sequentes vero pervenerunt ad cognitionem mutationum substantialium: postremi vero, ut Plato et Aristoteles, pervenerunt ad cognoscedum principium totius esse*. See also VIII, ii, §974 where he speaks of Aristotle and *plures Platonicorum*.


\(^8^9\) Taylor in Averroes, *Long Commentary*, xviii, n. 7.
A good deal has been made of Thomas’ statement in his Commentary on the De Caelo of Aristotle that “the study of philosophy is not for the purpose of knowing what humans might perceive, but how the truth of things would actually have it.” The search for truth rather than opinion is supposed to characterise Aquinas in opposition to Simplicius. Since, however, Thomas’ commentary is so dependent Moerbeke’ translation of Simplicius, On the De Caelo, that Aquinas’ work may have been occasioned by its completion on the 15th of June 1271, more caution in making the contrast ought to have been used. Aquinas is commenting on a chapter of the De Caelo where Aristotle starts his argument as to whether the heaven is ungenerated and indestructible or the contrary, a matter of great importance to Aquinas, and one where the position of Plato is closer to Christian faith than Aristotle’s. Aristotle begins not only by surveying the theories of other thinkers but also by justifying this procedure. Simplicius and Aquinas spin out his brief remarks into three reasons and, exceptionally, Aquinas goes beyond Simplicius—something hard to do—in order to make the same points even more strongly. His exposition becomes an explanation and justification of his own method, and of scholastic method generally.

First, demonstrations are criticisms of contrary opinions and “Whoever wishes to know any truth, must know the doubts which are against that truth, because the solution of doubts is the finding of truth, as is said in III Metaphysics. And thus, to know the truth, it is very important to see the reasons for contrary opinions.” Thomas’ (and Simplicius) second reason, has to do with persuasion. The conclusions are rendered more credible “if first the solutions of the reasons which gave rise to the dispute are given. For as long as a man is in doubt, before his doubt is resolved, his mind is like someone bound, who cannot move.’’ Third, following both Aristotle and Simplicius, Aquinas says that we must behave as judges, not as adversaries at law criticising out of hatred alone. He adds “This is not appropriate to philosophers, who profess to be searchers for the truth.” Consequently when a few

90 Aquinas, In De Caelo, I, xxii, §228, p. 109: studium philosophiae non est ad hoc quod sciatur quid homines senserint, sed quod se habeat veritas rerum.
92 For a small sampling of Thomas’ reproduction of Simplicius’ history and acceptance of his judgments on the hermeneutic principles compare Aquinas, In De Caelo (ed. Spiazzi) with Simplicius [philosophus acutissimus], Commentaria in quatuor libros de celo Aristotelis, Guillermo Morbeto Interprete (Venice: apud H. Scotum, 1540) as follows: prooemium, §4 = prooemium; I, vi §61 = fol. 14‘a, comm. 11; I, xxii §§223-228 = fol. 46‘a - fol. 47‘b, comments 98-100; I, xxiii §233 = fol. 48‘b, comm. 102; I, xxix §277 = fol. 54‘a, comm. 125; I, xxii §283 = fol. 55‘b -’a, comm. 129; II, iii §314 = fol. 61‘a, comm. 5; III, ii §§551- 555 = fol. 90‘ comments 4 & 5.
94 Aquinas, In De Caelo, I, xxii, §223, p. 108: Secundo igitur: contrariorum enim etc., assignat rationes tres quare hic et alibi aliorum opiniones pertractat. Quorum primum est quia demonstrationes, idest probations, contrariarum opinionum, sunt dubitationes de contrariis, scilicet opinionibus, idest sunt objectiones ad contrarias opiniones: expediat autem ei qui vult cognoscere aliquam veritatem, ut sciat dubitationes quae sunt contra illam veritatem; quia solutio dubitatorium est inventio veritatis, ut dicitur in III Metaphys. Et ita ad scientiam veritatem multum valet videere rationes contrariarum opinionum.
95 Aquinas, In De Caelo, I, xxii, §224, p. 108: quia ea quae dicenda sunt magis reducuntur credibilius apud illos qui primo audiant justifications, idest rectifications, sermonum dubitatorium, idest solutiones rationum ex quibus dubitatio emergit: quia quandum bonus dubitatus, antequam eius dubitation solvatur, est mens eius similis ligato, qui non potent ire.
96 Aquinas, In De Caelo, I, xxii, §225, p. 108: Et dicit quod quando nos posuerimus opiniones aliorum, et inducissimur eorum rationes, et moverimus eorum rationes, et moverimus rationes in contrariam, minus inerit nobis quod videamur condemnare dicta aliorum gratis, idest sine debita ratione, sicut qui reprobant dicta aliorum ex solo odio, quod non convenit philosophis, qui
paragraphs later, Aquinas, after he has read Simplicius’ prolix report of Alexander’s arguments, and his equally prolix defence of Plato as treated unfairly because he was not speaking literally, asserts that philosophy studies the truth of things not opinions, we both feel his impatience and know that he is in agreement with Aristotle and Simplicius about method.

Both commentators distinguish rational demonstration of the truth of things from historical work, and from the dialectic of positions which history makes possible. The historical, linguistic, and grammatical inquiries in commentary, the exposition and clarification of the argument, were parts of, but subordinate to, philosophical demonstration. No more than Aquinas, had Simplicius thought that his report of the positions of others and his reconciling strategy set him against finding the truth of things.

Michael Chase describes the criteria for the good exegete of Aristotle which Simplicius sets out in his commentary on the *Categories*, a work Thomas had and used:

>a master exegete must be thoroughly familiar with the Stagirite’s writings and stylistic habits, and be objective, not always striving to prove that Aristotle is right, “as if he had enrolled himself in the Philosopher’s school.” When it comes to apparent disagreements between Plato and Aristotle, however, the good exegete “must…not convict the philosophers of discordance by looking only at the letter of what [Aristotle] says against Plato; but he must look towards the spirit, and track down the harmony which reigns between them on the majority of points.”

This describes generally Thomas’ practice as exegete of Aristotle, and so far as the method of bringing Plato and Aristotle into concord is concerned, he increasingly took this route. There can be no doubt that Aquinas practiced philosophical commentary within the long tradition, did so better and more confidently as he had texts translated directly from the Greek to help him, and that he followed them and his earlier mentors in thinking that it was a way to determine the truth of things.

**MIXING UP PHILOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY**

If this case exhibits how important the interplay of positions is, another example displays again both how philosophy and Christian theology are intertwined and how Aquinas’ understanding and casting of his players changes. We are led to it by a note in Père Gauthier’s edition of Thomas’ *Commentary on the De Anima* of Aristotle. When he arrives at perhaps the most disputed passage in Aristotle’s works, the treatment of the poetic and potential intellects, and of intellect as separable, impassive and unmixed, Thomas sets up a tiny version of the mini questions he often inserts into his commentaries. This one considers “that the agent intellect is not a separated substance.” In it “some (quidam)” are represented as claiming, on the basis of this passage, that the agent intellect is a separate substance and that it differs substantially from the potential intellect. Gauthier explains “quidam” starting...
with the *Sentences* commentary. We shall follow the path traced with some additions of my own.

As when, in the same neophyte work, he considered the divergent opinions on the matter of the celestial bodies, Aquinas begins with sweeping statements while determining this question: "almost all philosophers after Aristotle are in accord that the agent and possible intellects differ substantially and that the agent intellect is a separated substance."\(^{100}\) He treats Avicenna, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Avempace, Theophrastus, Themistius, and Averroes, in the article, and although he has a Latin translation of Avicenna’s writings on the soul, Richard Taylor tells us that "with the exception of two sentences on the teaching of Avicenna, the sole source for Aquinas on these thinkers appears to be the *Long Commentary* by Averroes."\(^{101}\) Except in the case of Avicenna, Aquinas tends to follow Averroes’ judgments on the views he reports of the other philosophers, both Arab and Greek. Aquinas will be glad to free himself of this subservience when he has some books of the Greek commentators.

Somewhat over a decade later, without any great improvement in his sources of information, treating the same question in the *Contra Gentiles*, the "almost all" has been reduced to Alexander of Aphrodisias and Avicenna, besides Averroes, as a matter of course.\(^{102}\) Significantly for understanding how Thomas’ mind works, because he will use the same argument again in a different context, and because it adds to the list of those on the side of a separate agent intellect, we note that both in this chapter and in one shortly earlier, Aquinas draws together these Peripatetics and the Platonists. He argues that there is either little or no difference between the doctrines that science flows into our souls from separate intelligible forms and from a single separate agent intellect; he asserts that both doctrines are false and that Aristotle has proved it.\(^{103}\) In any case, by this argument Plato and his followers have been added to the "quidam." The "Disputed Questions de Anima" contribute almost nothing, "quidam" has become "many."\(^{104}\)

Thereafter, constructing the list takes a different turn in virtue of Thomas’ reading of Themistius’ Paraphrase of the De Anima on which Averroes was very dependent.\(^{105}\) There he finds a formula for relating Plato and Aristotle, like the one he learned from Simplicius, one

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\(^{100}\) Aquinas, *Super Sent.*, lib. 2 d. 17 q. 2 a. 1 co: *fere omnes philosophi concordant post Aristotelem, quod intellectus agens et possibilis differunt secundum substantiam; et quod intellectus agens sit substantia quaedam separata, et postrema in substantiis separatis, et ita se habet ad intellectum possibilem quod intelligentias, sicut intelligentiae superiores ad animas orbium.*


\(^{102}\) Aquinas, *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2 cap. 76 n. 1: *Ex his etiam concludi potest quod nec intellectus agens est unus in omnibus, ut Alexander etiam ponit, et Averroena, qui non ponunt intellectum possibilem esse unum omnium.*

\(^{103}\) Aquinas, *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2 cap. 76 n. 5: *Item. Plato posit scientiam in nobis causari ab ideis, quas panebat esse quasdam substantias separatas: quam quidem positionem Aristoteles improbat in I metaphysicae. Constat autem quod scientia nostra dependet ab intellectu agente sic ex primo principio. Si igitur intellectus agens esset quaedam substantia separata, nulla esset vel modica differentia inter opinionem istam et Platonican a philosopho improbatam. Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2 cap. 74 n. 5: *Sed si diligenter consideraretur, haec positionem, quantum ad originem, parum aut nihil differt a positione Platonis. Posuit enim Plato formas intelligibilis esse quasdam substantias separatas, a quibus scientia fluebat in animas nostras. Hic autem ponit ab una substantia separata, quaee est intellectus agens secundum ipsum, scientiam in animas nostras fluere. Non autem differt, quantum ad modum acquiridem scientiam, utrum ab una vel pluribus substantiis separatis scientia nostra causetur: utroquie enim sequetur quod scientia nostra non causetur a sensibilibus.*

\(^{104}\) Aquinas, *Q. d. de anima*, a. 5 co: *Et ideo plures posuerunt intellectum agente esse substantiam separatum, intellectum autem possibilem esse aliud animae nostrae.*

\(^{105}\) Taylor, "Themistius and the Development of Averroes’ Noetics."
which he will use frequently. We find it first in the question on the human intellectual powers in the *Summa theologiae*. In this *Summa*, Themistius is named on the initial appearance of the formula: “Aristotle compared the active intellect to light, which is something received into the air; while Plato compared the separate intellect impressing the soul to the sun, as Themistius says in his commentary on *De Anima III*.” It is used again in the next article “Whether the Agent intellect is One in all.” Importantly, in these questions only philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, are named, and the *sic et non* arises almost entirely out of the text the *De Anima*.

The next use of Themistius’ formula brings in a surprising new name. In the *Disputed Questions on Spiritual Creatures*, once again asking exactly the same question as in the *Summa*, Augustine shows up often in the *sic et non*. In his determination, after the sun – light comparison credited again to Themistius, Augustine appears in a quotation which both places him among those for whom the sun illumines mind, and as identifying the separate intellect with God. Aquinas writes:

But that which makes things intelligible after the manner of the sun, which illuminates, is something that is one and separate, which is God. Hence Augustine says in *I Soliloquia*: “Reason promises...to show God to my mind as the sun is shown to the eyes; for the eyes of the mind, so to speak, are the senses of the soul. But all the most certain branches of learning are of such a nature as things illumined by the sun, so that they can be seen...and God Himself is the one who illumines.”

In his reply to the eighth objection which comes from Augustine, Aquinas must treat him again. However, as you will remember, in these *Disputed Questions*, we also met Simplicius *On the Categories*. In virtue of joining Simplicius’ way of distinguishing the Platonic and the Aristotelian epistemological procedures by their starting points with Themistius’ differentiation of the philosophers according to the mode of illumination, Augustine’s position is understood through the logic which compels the history of philosophy. These historical progressions, become more a mode of explanation and persuasion as Thomas immerses himself in Aristotle, his Greek commentators, Peripatetic and Neoplatonist, and in Platonic texts, Augustinian, Dionysian and Proclean. I shall say something further about them shortly. Here Aquinas writes:

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106 The formula is found at VI, p. 235, u. 355 ff. in Verbeke’s edition. For other lists of its use see the note of Cos in Aquinas, *Quaestio Disputata de Spiritualibus Creaturis*, 10 ad 8, p. 106, lines 277-278 and Bazán in Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Anima*, ed. D.-C. Bazán, Commissione Leonina, vol. 24, pars 1 (Rome/Paris 1996), 14*

107 Aquinas, *ST* 1.79.5 ad 3: *Ad tertium dicendum quod omnia quae sunt unius speciei, communicant in actione consequente naturam speciei, et per consequens in virtute, quae est actionis principium, non quod sit eadem numero in omnibus. Cognoscere autem prima intelligibilia est actio consequens speciem humanam. Unde oportet quod omnes homines communicent in virtute, quae est principio luis actionis, et hoc est virtus intellectus agentis. Nond tamen oportet quod sit eadem numero in omnibus. Oportet tamen quod ab uno principio in omnibus derivetur. Et sic illa communicatio hominum in principiis intelligibilibus, demonstrat unitatem intellectus separati, quem Plato comparat soli; non autem unitatem intellectus agentis, quem Aristoteles comparat lumini. And 1.79. 4 co: *Et ideo Aristoteles comparavit intellectum agentem lumini, quod est aliquid receptum in aere, Plato autem intellectum separatum imprimentem in animas nostras, comparavit soli; ut Themistius dicit in commentario tertii de anima. Aquinas, Quaestio Disputata de Spiritualibus Creaturis, 10 co: *Illud vero quod facti intelligibilia per modum solis illuminantis, est unum separatum, quod est Deus. Unde Augustinus dicit in I Soliloquiorum: promittit ratio (...) se demonstraturam Deum neca menti, ut oculos sol demonstratur; num mentis quasi oculi sunt sensus animae. Disciplinarum autem quaeque certissima tali sunt qualia illa quae sole illustrantur, ut videri possint. Deus autem est ipse qui illustrat.*

108 Aquinas, *ST* 1.44.2, *ST* 1.84.1 with 1.84.2.
But yet in order to examine more searchingly the meaning of Augustine and what the truth is on this point, it must be noted that certain ancient philosophers, who did not assert any way of knowing except sensation nor any entities besides sensible things, declared that no certainty concerning truth could be had by us…

Providently, Plato arises to bring the certainty to knowing which faith requires:

Plato...agreeing with the ancient philosophers that sensible things are always in flux and that the sense power has no certain judgment of things, Plato... in order to establish the certainty of knowing posited, on the one hand, species separated from sensible things and immovable, and he said that the sciences concerned these; on the other hand, he posited in man a knowing power higher than sense, namely, the mind or intellect, illumined by a kind of higher intelligible sun, as the sight is illumined by the visible sun.

Augustine follows him. Although, as a Christian, he was compelled to place the ideas in the divine mind, our minds know by participating in these:

Augustine, however, following Plato as far as the Catholic Faith allowed, did not posit species of things with a subsistence of their own, but, instead of them, he posited ideas of things in the divine mind and said that through these, by an intellect which is illumined by divine light, we form judgments about all things.

In order to complete the history, Aquinas tells us that “Aristotle proceeded by another way,” which he describes in three brief points, ending remarkably:

Thirdly,...above the sense there is an intellectual power which makes judgments concerning truth, not through any intelligible things that exist outside, but through the light of the agent intellect, which makes things intelligible. Now it does not matter much if we say that intelligible things themselves are participated in from God, or that the light which makes them intelligible is participated in from God.
The last word is conciliatory, but in the conciliation Aristotle is moved towards Plato. It is no great matter whether as Christians we speak Platonically or in an Aristotelian manner, provided, that either the ideas or the light in which our minds participate are in the divine intellect or are God. Here as elsewhere, one of the costs of agreement is that Aristotle’s teaching will be expressed in the language of participation.\footnote{115}

The final work in the list inspired by “quidam” we shall treat combines historical investigation and concordance between Aristotle and Platonism enabled by Moerbeke’s translations. Here “almost all philosophers after Aristotle” or an indefinite has become a carefully constructed arrangement of a large cast of philosophical players, because the structure of the array is itself the greatest part of the argument. The title of \textit{De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas} identifies its opponent, the movement in the Parisian Faculty of Arts which Aquinas represents as inspired by Averroes.\footnote{116} Aquinas employs what Alain de Libera has shown to be critical historical method in respect to philosophical traditions.\footnote{117} He is using Moerbeke translations of Alexander of Aphrodisias, Simplicius, and Themistius, amongst other commentators, in an effort to refute philosophers like Siger of Brabant who claim to be faithful Aristotelians. Crucially, although the error attacked, that there is only one possible intellect for all humans, contradicts Christian faith—as the ecclesiastical condemnations which come quickly after the publication of the treatise attest—Aquinas is determined to do this without leaving the sphere of philosophy.

Thomas uses two weapons in his battle against error: the authority of the history of philosophy and philosophical argument. The opening words of \textit{On the Unity of the Intellect}, “Just as all men naturally desire to know the truth, so there is a natural desire innate in them to flee error” are an implicit reference to the first words of the \textit{Metaphysics} with a negative twist added.\footnote{119} Appropriately then, he intends to show the position of these Latins to be “no less against the principles of philosophy than against the documents of faith.”\footnote{120} Thomas belittles the knowledge of the texts of those he opposes at the same time as declares his first line of attack: “They say they follow the words of the Peripatetics, though they have never seen their books on the subject [of the possible intellect] except those of Aristotle who was the founder of the Peripatetic school; we shall show first that the aforesaid position is...

\footnote{115}{For other reconciliations of Augustine and Aristotle on knowing see ScG III.46 where Thomas endeavours to mould a text from the \textit{De Trinitate} so that Augustine does not teach that the soul immediately knows itself and thus becomes compatible with Aristotle. Houston Smit, “Aquinas’s Abstractionism,” \textit{Medieval Philosophy and Theology} 10 (2001): 85–118 argues that Aquinas seeks a general reconciliation of Aristotle’s abstraction and Augustine’s innatism and doctrine of recollection; in “Participatio divini luminis, Aquinas’ doctrine of the Agent Intellect: Our Capacity for Contemplation,” \textit{Dionysius} 22 (2004): 149–78, I endeavour to place Smit’s demonstration within the programme of the Neoplatonists to reconcile Plato and Aristotle. On the struggle to describe Aquinas’ thought in this language, see \textit{Penser avec Thomas d’Aquin: Etudes thomistes de Louis-Bertrand Geiger OP}, présentées par Ruedi Imbach, Pensée antique et médiévale (Paris/Fribourg: Cerf/Editions Universitaires de Fribourg, 2000) and my “From Metaphysics to History.”}

\footnote{116}{On the title see Gauthier in Aquinas, \textit{De Unitate Intellectus}, 247–48.}


\footnote{119}{Aquinas, \textit{De Unitate Intellectus}, cap. 1, p. 292, lines 1-2: \textit{Sicut omnes homines naturaliter scire desiderant veritatem, ita naturale desiderium inest hominibus fugiendi errores...}}

\footnote{120}{Ibid., lines 20-21: \textit{Nec id nunc agendum est ut positionem prædictam in hoc ostendamus esse erroneam quia repugnat veritati fidei Christianae.}}
entirely repugnant to his words and opinions.” They have read nothing beyond Aristotle except Averroes and he is not a genuine Peripatetic! Thomas’ sense of the superiority of his learning carries through to the conclusion and, indeed, largely constructs it.

Because Thomas has Moerbeke’s translation of Themistius’ paraphrase of the De Anima, he is able to address and modify “the image which Averroes presented to the Latins of the psychology of Themistius,” to which he was himself subject when he treated the same matter in his Sentences commentary. In consequence of this and much else, with a mixture of indignation and contempt, he can invoke the authority of “all the philosophers, Arabs and Peripatetics,” except these Latins, and most strongly, every Greek: Aristotle, Theophrastus, Themistius and Plato himself, when he concludes. He is definitive, the Parisian philosophers have picked the wrong master, Averroes, whose interpretation of Aristotle they were following, “was not so much a Peripatetic as a corrupter of Peripatetic philosophy.”

The most well known of those against whom he battles is Siger of Brabant, whom he does not name. We cannot deal here with the long and much disputed questions: Did Aquinas and his fellow theologians create the position they opposed? Is it, in fact, that of Averroes? Is Aquinas fair either to Averroes, to whom he owed much even on the matter in question, or to Siger, who seems to have corrected his positions in light of Thomas’ criticisms? Is he just to both his and Siger’s neo-Augustinian adversaries? This is regrettable because in these questions are perhaps the best evidence for the overall thesis of this lecture. Nonetheless, there is no more obvious case than this in which the construction of the authorities is the argument and there are some striking moments when he brings up Simplicius and Themistius. We shall conclude with these.

In the first of these Plato is understood through Aristotle in order to save the standing of Plotinus and Themistius as Aristotelian commentators. Plato is reported by Nemesius, masked as Gregory of Nyssa, as believing man is only intellect, a soul using a body. This is interpreted through Plotinus via Macrobius whom he had already used in a sed

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121 Ibid., lines 34-38: Peripateticorum verba sectari se dicit, quorum libros nonquam in hac materia viderunt, nisi Aristotelis qui fuit sectae Peripateticae institutor; ostendumus primo positionem praedicatam eius verba et sententiae repugnare omnino. And 5, p. 314, lines 394-395: Unde mirum est quomodo aliqui, solum commentum Averroys videntes, pronuntiare praesumunt…


contra of the *Summa Theologiae* to give authority to his own position on how to structure the virtues. There we had Plotinus, *inter philosophiae professores cum Platonice princeps*.126 Now Thomas tells us that:

Plotinus, as Macrobius reports, claimed that the soul itself is man, saying, “Therefore the true man is not what is seen, but that which rules what is seen…….” Yet Simplicius, in his commentary on the *Categories*, numbers Plotinus among the greatest commentators on Aristotle. This doctrine does not seem far distant from the words of Aristotle, who says in Book Nine of the *Ethics*… “just as the state and every other organized whole seems to be that which is the chief thing in it, so too man,” and adds that “each man either is this, namely intellect, or is it especially.” It is in this sense that I appraise Themistius’s words earlier and Plotinus’s now when they say that man is soul or intellect.127

At the beginning of the next chapter, before getting on to his main object, destroying the idea of a single possible intellect for humans, when citing Themistius, for the first time in this treatise, on the sun-light difference as models for knowing, he makes some conciliating remarks in respect to the single agent intellect in a way we might anticipate from his treatment of Augustine in *On Spiritual Creatures*:

There would perhaps be some reason for saying [that there is one for all] of agent intellect, and many philosophers do say it, for nothing absurd seems to follow from several things being perfected by one agent, as by one sun the visual powers of all animals are able to see. Although this is not Aristotle’s intention—he holds that the agent intellect is in the soul—he nonetheless compares it to a light, and Plato, holding that the intellect is one separate thing, likened it to the sun, as Themistius tells us, for there is one sun but many lights diffused from it for the sake of seeing.128

We come in the last chapter of the treatise to the second appearance of Themistius’ formula and we find Avicenna and Plato joining the war against Averroes and his Parisian followers on the numerical multiplication of the intellect. In order to invoke them, he must,

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126 Aquinas, *ST* 2.1.16.1 *sed contra*.
127 Aquinas, *De Unitate Intellectus*, cap. 3, p. 305, line 264—p. 306, line 289: *Sed et Plotinus, ut Macrobius refert, ipsam animam hominum esse testatur, sic dicens: ergo qui videtur, non ipse versus homo est, sed illc a quo regitur quod videtur. Sic, cum morte animalis discidit animatio, cadit corpus a regente viduatum; et hoc est quod videtur in homine mortale. Anima vero, quae versus homo est, ab omni mortalitate conditione aliena est. Quia quidem Plotinus, unus de magnis commentatoribus, ponitur inter commentatores Aristotelis, ut Simplicius refert in commento praedicamentorum. Haec autem sententia nec a verbis Aristotelis multum aliena videtur. Dicit enim in nono Ethic., quod boni hominis est bonum elaborare et sui ipsius gratia: intellectivi gratia quod unusquisque esse videtur. Quod quidem non dicit propter hoc quod homo sit solus intellectus, sed quia id quod est in homine principalius est intellectus; unde in consequentibus dicit, quod quemadmodum civitas principalissimum maxime esse videtur, et omnis alia constitutio, sic et homo; unde subiungit, quod unusquisque homo vel est hoc, scil. intellectus, vel maxime. Est per hunc modum arbitror et Themistium in verbis supra positis, et Plotinum in verbis nunc inductis, dixisse quod homo est anima vel intellectus.*
128 Aquinas, *De Unitate Intellectus*, cap. 4, p. 307, lines 6-12: *Forte enim de agente hoc dicere, aliquam rationem habere, et multi philosophi hoc posuerunt. Nihil enim inveniems videtur sequi, si ab uno agente multa perfectiunterg, quemadmodum ab uno sole perficiuntur omnes potentiae visivis animalium ad videndum; quanrnvis eiunm hoc non sit secundum intentionem Aristotelis, qui possit intellectum agentem esse aliquid in anima, unde comparavit ipsum luminii. Plato autem ponens intellectum unum separatum, comparavit ipsum soli, ut Themistius dixit. Est enim unus sol, sed plura lumina diffusa a sole ad videndum.*
as at the beginning of chapter 4, abstract from the truth of their views about how intellect acts:

And lest we omit the Greeks, we should cite the words of Themistius in his commentary. For when he asked of the agent intellect whether it was one or many, he answered: “Either the first illuminator is one but the illumined and illuminating many: for the sun is one, but you will say that light is in some way imparted to sight. For this reason Aristotle proposes light rather than the sun in the comparison, but Plato proposes the sun.” It is clear from these words of Themistius that neither the agent intellect, of which Aristotle speaks, is the one who is illuminator, nor the possible that which is illumined. There is indeed one principle of illumination, namely a certain separated substance which is either God, according to Catholics, or the ultimate intelligence according to Avicenna. Themistius proves the unity of this separate principle by the fact that the teacher and learner understand the same thing, which would not be the case if there were not the same illuminating principle. What he says later, that some doubt whether the possible intellect is one, is certainly true. But he says no more of this because his intention was not to discuss the diverse opinions of philosophers, but to explicate the teachings of Aristotle, Plato and Theophrastus. Hence at the end he concludes, “What I said to express what seemed to philosophers to be singular difficulty and concern. From what I have said, one can gather the views of Aristotle and Theophrastus, and especially of Plato, about them.” It is evident, therefore, that Aristotle and Theophrastus and Themistius and Plato himself did not hold as a principle that the possible intellect is one for all.129

Concordance and suspending decision about the truth of things are means by which Plato can be united to Aristotle and the Peripatetics and they to him in order to amass philosophical authorities against threats on the home front.

FROM DOXOGRAPHY TO HISTORY

As I have suggested, Moerbeke’s translation of Themistius’ paraphrase of the De Anima did more than expand Thomas’ knowledge of the positions of the philosophers. When joined with Simplicius On the Categories, it enabled him to discern what Jan Aertsen

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129 Aquinas, De Unitate Intellectus, cap. 5, p. 314, lines 354-389: Et ut Graecos non omittamus, ponenda sunt circa hoc verba Themistii in commento. Cum enim quasivisset de intellectu agente, utrum sit unus aut plures, subiungit salvum: aut primus quidem illustrans est unus, illustrati autem et illustrantes sunt plures. Sol quidem enim est unus, lumen autem dices modo aliquo partiri ad visus. Propter hoc enim non solem in comparatione posuit (sic. Aristoteles), sed lumen; Plato autem solem. Ergo patet per verba Themistii quod nec intellectus agens, de quo Aristoteles loquitur, est unus qui est illustrans, nec etiam possibilis qui est illustratus. Sed verum est quod principium illustrationis est unum, scil. aliqua substantia separata, vel Deus secundum Catholicos, vel intelligentia ultima secundum Avicennam. Unitatem autem huius separati principii probat Themistius per hoc, quod docens et addiscens idem intelligit, quod non esset nisi esset idem principium illustrans. Sed verum est quod postea dicit quodam dubitasse de intellectu possibili, utrum sit unus. Nec circa hoc plus loquitur, quia non erat intentio eius tangere diversas opiniones philosophorum, sed exponere sententias Aristoteles, Platonis et Theophrasti; unde in fine conclusit: sed quod quidem dicit pronunciare quidem de eo quod videtur philosophos, singularis est studii et sollicitudinis. Quod autem maxime aliquis utique ex verbis quae collegimus, accipiat de his sententiam Aristotelis et Theophrasti, magis autem et ipsius Platonis, hoc proutrum est propalare. Ergo patet quod Aristoteles et Theophrastus et Themistius et ipsus Plato non habuerunt pro principio, quod intellectus possibilis sit unus in omnibus.
calls “historical progression” in philosophy, Aertsen points us to the question in the Summa theologiae on whether prime matter is caused by God. It seems, contrary to the Christian faith, here articulated by Augustine in the sed contra, that, as the Aristotelian supposition of all change, prime matter cannot be made (facta). However, in fact, “the ancient philosophers advanced in the knowledge of the truth”, though “step by step and, as it were, haltingly.” Ultimately, by advancing to more and more universal causes, “some”, which certainly includes for him Aristotle, “climbed to the consideration of being as being (ens inquantum est ens).” “So we must posit that even prime matter is caused by the universal cause of beings.” Aristotle has arrived at a condition of creation from nothing and, as Aertsen observes, it “appears as the result of the internal development of thought independent of the external aid of revelation.”

We are brought to the role of Themistius in constructions of this kind by another progressive history in the Summa. This one appears when Thomas asks “Whether the soul knows bodily things through its own essence.” There, when starting with the antiqui philosophi, he gives as their principle “like is known by like (simile simili)”, with the consequence that the object known is in the knower corporeally as it is in the known. Aquinas follows this with a representation of Plato as moving truth forward by use of the same principle in order to teach, on the contrary, an immaterial knowing positing as its object an immaterial separate form. In this treatise of the Summa, he uses the formula repeatedly, and even more frequently in his Exposition of the De Anima written at the same time. Thomas had used simile simili only once before. That ‘like is known by like’ was a principle of the physicists is from Aristotle’s De Anima, however, its new frequent use by Aquinas in his progressive histories constructed in the Summa and De Anima commentary may be explained by its appearance in Themistius.

At the place where the formula occurs in Aristotle and Themistius, Thomas begins his comment by observing that the antiqui philosophi, “compelled by the truth itself”, assumed that the principles of things were in the soul. This notion is found in Aristotle who speaks in the Metaphysics of “the things themselves opening the way and compelling the first philosophers to seek”, and of the ancients being “compelled by the truth itself”. Similarly, in the Physics, he finds the same philosophers “compelled as it were by the truth itself”. Thomas does not fail to notice these compulsions and comments on them in his expositions

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130 Aertsen, “Aquinas’s Philosophy,” 28; he does not mention the role of the Themistius paraphrase or of Simplicius.

131 ST 1.44.2: Respondeo dicendum quod antiqui philosophi paulatim, et quasi pedentem, intraverunt in cognitionem veritatis. A principio enim, quasi grossiores existentes, non existimabant esse entia nisi corpora sensibilia.... Ulterius vero procedentes, distinguenter per intellectum inter formam substantialem et materiam, quam ponabant increatam;... Quam transmutationem quasdam causas universaliores ponebant, ut obliquum circulum, secundum Aristotelem, vel ideas, secundum Platonem....Utrique igitur consideraverunt ens particulari quodam consideratione, vel inquantum est hoc ens, vel inquantum est tale ens. ... Et sic oportet ponere etiam materiam primam creatam ab universali causa entium.


133 Aquinas, Sententia de anima, I, iv; I, v (thrice); I, xii (four times); II, ix (thrice); II, x (four times).

134 Aquinas, De Veritate, 2.2 co.

135 Aristotle, De Anima, 404b17.


137 Aristotle, Metaphysics, I, 3.984a18: res ipsa viam facit simili et quaerere coegit and 984b10: ab ipsa veritate.

138 Aristotle, Physics, I, 10 188b29-30: tangam ab ipsa veritate coacti.
of the works. However, in his *Exposition of the De Anima*, he adds the physicists “dreamed, as it were, of the truth.” This dreaming seems designed to explain why these ancients could not give reasons for what they said and why they were moved upward towards incorporeal causes. Be that as it may, Themistius had the same explanation; he wrote that “they seem to dream up this reality, the incorporeal nature I mean.” Thomas may be following Themistius.

Thomas’ most detailed progressive history is found in his *On the Separate Substances*, angels, which, like his *Exposition of the Liber de Causis*, depended on Moerbeke’s translation of Proclus’ *Elements*. Proclus added to the information available for writing a progressive and conciliating history of philosophy and theology, pagan, Jewish, Islamic and Christian. The first chapter of the history concerns “The opinions of the ancients and of Plato.” There is a movement forward among the ancients towards the knowledge of separate substance; they get beyond the corporeal gods of the atomists and the Epicurean search for ceaseless pleasures which such deities inspire. Plato does better than his predecessors in dealing with the two errors philosophy must overcome. One is the denial that humans can know with certainty. The second is that nothing exists separate from bodies. Plato solves both errors, solves them together, and his solution is correct insofar 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 order to save knowledge, Plato simply reversed the Physicists, solving the problem too immediately. Plato projected what belongs to our thinking onto an external reality:

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.

For Aquinas, Plato’s work is an essential part of the philosophical progress. However, history quickly becomes more complicated. Thomas notes that the *Platonici* posited orders of separate forms upon which intellects depended. Plato is represented as establishing a hierarchy in which mathematicalals are intermediate between the forms and sensibles. At the highest level were entities like the good itself, intellect itself, and life itself. Aquinas judged that, in this case, the Platonic error in solving the epistemological dilemma involved a false separation of the object from the subject of intellection. The *intelligibilia* were separated from the intellects when the “gods, which is what Plato called the separate intelligible forms,” were separated from knowing. The philosophical error involved in this

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141 Aquinas, *In Physica*, 1, x, §79, p. 43; *In Meta.*, I, v, §93, p. 28; I, xii, §194, p. 57 and I, xvii, §272, p. 78.
142 Aquinas, *Sententia de anima*, I, iv, p. 18, lines 17-19: *antiqui philosophi quasi ab ipso veritate coacti somniabant quoquo modo veritatem*.
145 Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 1, D 42, lines 75-79: *unde secundum hoc quod intellectus veritatem cognoscss aliqua seorsum apprehendit praeiter materiam sensibilium rerum, sic aestimavit esse aliqua a sensibilibus separatas*.
146 Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 1, D 42, lines 94-104: *media inter species seu ideas et sensibilium*.
147 Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 4, D 47, lines 3-19: *demos dicebat esse species intelligibiles separates*. 
separation of subject and object evidently has religious consequences. Happily, Aristotle does not need separate forms to explain how we know.\textsuperscript{148} Thus, as he judged in his Exposition of the Liber, in this aspect of his teaching on the kinds of separate substances, Aristotle’s parsimony is “more consonant with the Christian faith.”\textsuperscript{149} However, the Platonic tendency to multiply entities also benefits the truth.

The second chapter of the De Substantiis Separatis, is devoted to the opinion of Aristotle. There he judges that Aristotle’s way of reasoning, by way of motion, to the existence of separate substances is manifestior et certior.\textsuperscript{150} In his On the Categories, Simplicius had also judged the Aristotelian way to have a more persuasive necessity for those living at the level of sensation.\textsuperscript{151} There is, however, a deficiency in Aristotle’s alia via. What is defective 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.”\textsuperscript{152} By limiting separate substances to the two kinds needed to move the heavens, and with their numbers tied to the same necessity, he fails, on the one hand, to account for the spirits which possess us and of which sorcerers dispose, and, on the other, by tying the number of the angels to the necessities of what is beneath them, he has reversed the proper order of reasoning.

Michael Chase refers us to another formula in Simplicius, On Aristotle’s Categories, relating Plato and Aristotle. It comes to mind at this point, because the implied criticism of Aristotle by Simplicius here is Aquinas’ own in respect to the number and kinds of spiritual creatures.

\textbf{[Aquinas] always refuses to deviate from nature; on the contrary, he considers even things that are above nature, according to their relation to nature, just as, by contrast,}

\textsuperscript{148} Aquinas, De Substantiis Separatis, cap. 2: \textit{Non enim necesse est ut ea quae intellectus separatim intelligit, separatim esse habeant in rerum natura.}

\textsuperscript{149} Aquinas, Super De causis, prop. 10, p. 67, line 19– p. 68, line 6. \textit{Circa primum igitur considerandum est quod, sicut supra iam diximus, Platonici, ponentes formas rerum separatas, sub harum formarum ordine ponebant ordinem intellectuum. Quia enim omnis cogitatio fit per assimilacionem intellectus ad rem intellectam, necesse erat quod intellectus separat ad intelligentiam participaret formas abstractas; et huiusmodi participations formarum sunt ipsis formae vel species intelligibles de quibus hic dicunt. Sed quia, secundum sententiam Aristotelis quae circa hoc est magis consona fidei Christianae, non ponimus alias formas separatas supra intellectum ordinem, sed ipsum bonum separatum ad quod tum universum ordinatur sicut ad bonum extrinsecum, ut dicitur in XII metaphysicae, opert nos dicere quod, sicut Platonici diehant intellectus separatius ex participacione diversarum formarum separatarum diversarum intelligibilis species consequi, ita nos dicamus quod consequuntur huiusmodi intelligibles species ex participacione primae formae separatae, quae est bonitas pura, scilicet Dei. He makes much the same point at prop. 13, p. 83, lines 8-17. He begins: secundum sententiam Aristotelis, quae in hoc magis Catholicae doctrinae concordat, non ponimus mulias formas supra intellectus sed unam solam quae est causa prima, opert dicere quod, sicut ipsa est ipsum esse, ita est ipsa vita et ipsa intellectus primus….}

\textsuperscript{150} Aquinas, De Substantiis Separatis, cap. 2, D 44, lines 11-13: \textit{Aristoteles manifestior et certiori via processit ad investigandum substantias a materia separatas, scilicet per viam motus. Compare ST 1.2.3 resp.: Prima autem et manifestior via est, quae sumitur ex parte motus. Certum est enim et sensu constat aliquid moveri in hoc mundo.}

\textsuperscript{151} Simplicius, Commentaire sur les Catégories, i, prologus, p. 8, line 74–p. 9, line 79. Chase translates, p. 22, lines 23-25: “Since he is conversing with people living on the level of sensation, he prefers that vividness which derives from sensation. This is why his demonstrations have such constraining force…”

\textsuperscript{152} Aquinas, De Substantiis Separatis, cap. 2, D 45: \textit{Hac autem Aristotelis positio certior quidem videtur, eo quod non multum recedit ab his quae sunt manifesta secundum sensum; tamen minus sufficienti videtur quam Platonis positio. Primo quidem, quia multa secundum sensum apparent quorum ratio reddi non potest secundum ea quae ab Aristotelis traduntur. Apparent enim in hominibus qui a Daemonibus oppressurur, et in magorum operibus, aliqua quae fieri non posse videntur nisi per aliquam intellectualem substantiam…. Secundo, quia inconveniens videtur immateriales substantias ad numerum corporalium substantiarum coactari. Non enim ea quae sunt superioria in entibus, sunt proprie ea quae in eis sunt inferiora, sed potius e converso: id enim proprie quod aliquid est, nobilissimum est.}
the divine Plato, according to Pythagorean usage, examines even natural things insofar as they participate in the things above nature.\textsuperscript{153}

As the treatise advances, the agreements of Plato and Aristotle are considered in the same way as their complementary differences had been. We cannot dilate on these but we must not fail to note an accord between Plato and Aristotle we have considered before which involves both the ongoing change in his view of Plato and, here, a clearly Platonic representation of what both Aristotle and Plato think. This is their agreement on the creation of all things by a single First Principle. In \textit{On Separate Substances}, Thomas reports that:

According to the opinion of Plato and Aristotle... It is necessary beyond the mode of coming to be, by which something becomes by the coming of form to matter [this doctrine he ascribed to the \textit{Naturales}], to presuppose another origin of things, according as \textit{esse} is bestowed on the whole universe of things by a first being which is its own being.\textsuperscript{154}

This creation \textit{ex nihilo} is not contradicted because Plato and Aristotle held immaterial substances and the heavenly bodies to have always existed. Aquinas declares that they did not therefore deny a cause of their being; indeed, they did not “deviate in this from the doctrine of Catholic faith” by positing \textit{increate}.\textsuperscript{155} He states the doctrine that God is the sole cause of being for all things in a form which is more Platonic than Aristotelian. The First Principle is called \textit{simplicissimum}, and Thomas argues that “because subsistent being must be one ... it is necessary that all other things which are under it exist in the way they do as participants in \textit{esse}”.\textsuperscript{156} His exposition of the \textit{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 from which being comes. Even if the Platonists “posited many gods ordered under one” rather than, as we do, “posing one only having all things in itself,” everyone agrees “universality of causality belongs to God.”\textsuperscript{157} The Platonic language betrays what underlies this concordance here.

The notion that Aristotle taught a doctrine of creation was developed among the late Antique conciliators of Plato and Aristotle. The Platonists want to draw together the pagan


\textsuperscript{154} Aquinas, \textit{De Substantiis Separatis}, cap. 9, D 57, lines 103-118: Oportet igitur supra modum fiendi quo aliquid fit, forma materiae adventiente, praetelligere aliam rerum originem, secundum quod esse attribuitur toti universitati rerum a primo ente, quod est suum esse.

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., cap. 9, D 58, lines 215-220: Non ergo aestimandum est quod Plato et Aristoteles, propter hoc quod posuerunt substantias immateriales seu etiam caelestia corpora semper fuisse, eis subtraxerunt causam essendi. Non enim in hoc a sententia Catholicae fidei deviatur, quod si quis posuerit ea semper fuisse, caussi contraeum fides Catholicae tenet.

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., cap. 9, D 57, lines 103-110: Cum enim necesse sit primum principium simplicissimum esse, necesse est quod non hoc modo esse ponatur quasi esse participantia, sed quasi ipsum esse existat. Quia vero esse subsistentis non potest esse nisi unum, sicut supra habitum est, necesse est omnia alia quae sub ipso sunt, sic esse quasi esse participantia.

\textsuperscript{157} Aquinas, \textit{Super De causis}, prop. 19, 106, lines 13-17: Causalitas autem horum ad ordinem divinum pertinent, sive ponatur multi dui ordinati sub uno secundum Platonicos, sive unus tantum in se omnia habens secundum nos: universalitas enim causalitatis propria est Deo.
Genesis, the *Timaeus*, and its “Demiurge” with Aristotle’s *Physics* and his Unmoved Mover. To do this they needed to find some way of reconciling Aristotle’s eternal universe with that in the *Timaeus*, which is, as Aquinas had discerned in his *Exposition of the De Caelo* written just before the *On Separate Substances*, generated and corruptible, though perpetual because it is held in being by the divine will. The efforts and diverse positions of the ancient commentators give rise to the pervasive notion in late Antiquity and the Middle Ages that Aristotle and Plato regarded the First Principle as a creator. Aquinas and his Aristotle are its heirs.

**CONCLUSION**

It is worse than useless to bring a conception of the history of philosophy to Aquinas—or indeed to other mediaeval philosophical theologians. This is not primarily because Aquinas’ understanding has crucial lacunae and inherited misidentifications and misconceptions—and some he conceives on his own—although there are plenty of those. More importantly, it is because the figures in the history acquire their characters mutually in the never ending disputation which philosophy is. From at least the beginning of the 19th century among us historical narrative became the equivalent of, or the replacement for, metaphysics. The result is three intertwined opposing movements in philosophy: increasingly demanding historical and philological study, history as ideology, and philosophy which subsists on the imagination of a timeless reason. If we follow or seek to understand Aquinas, we cannot divide history and philosophy in these ways. Certainly, the last fantasy is not Thomas’. The relation of reason to its intellectual principle for him is fundamentally Proclean. In consequence, reason circles round its centre variously; one of these motions his *Summa theologica* exhibits. A

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159 Aquinas, *In De Caelo*, I, xxiii § 236, p. 113; I, xxix § 283, p. 138.


distinguished graduate, both of my own university and this, described how reason moves for Proclus in words with which we may close, although not end:

[A]s long as our thinking remains dianoia without passing over into Nous it will seek wholeness without achieving it. ... [D]ianoia is always still on the way. The intelligible is present to it only through its own dividing circuit of Nous ... This circuit is never finished for dianoia because dianoia is a circumference which never touches the centre which it explicates. ... [It] is erotic ... drawn towards its object.¹⁶⁴

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