

Political, Psychic, Intellectual, Daimonic, Hierarchical, Cosmic, and Divine: Justice in Aquinas, Al-Fârâbî, Dionysius, and Porphyry¹

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Herein I propose to read Late Ancient Philosophy on justice backwards: starting from a Mediaeval phenomenon, I shall trace its Ancient sources and then consider how the Mediaevals transformed them. I begin from two major thinkers in the period we designate as Mediaeval, Thomas Aquinas (†1274) and Al-Fârâbî (†950). They are widely separated by time and culture, but are nonetheless connected within a more or less Neoplatonised Peripatetic tradition. We shall find that their treatments of justice are importantly different. This is owed, at least in part, to Classical Antiquity being mediated to them in two different ways.

Aquinas is one with most of his Latin contemporaries in probably not having read a single dialogue of Plato, and indubitably not the *Republic*. His small knowledge of the texts of Plato comes through other authors. For example, he certainly had excerpts of the *Timaeus* by diverse media because the commentary by Calcidius (5th century) was generally known by Latin Mediaevals.² However, the source of Thomas' late references to "Plato in *Tymeo*" in his *Sentencia Libri De Sensu et Sensato* is earlier though equally indirect; it seems to be the commentary of Alexander of Aphrodisias († circa 215) on Aristotle's book.³ Nonetheless, Thomas learns a great deal about Platonism from many of the best ancient sources, starting with Aristotle and Augustine (†430), going on with Boethius (†525 or 526) and the pseudo-Dionysius (6th century), and concluding with Simplicius (flourished after 532) and Proclus (†485)—to name only the more influential.⁴ Aquinas has also later sources, of which the determinedly Aristotelian Averroes (†1198) is one.⁵ As a result, although his Plato never escapes Aristotle's critical representation of him, it is largely poised between Middle and Neo-Platonisms, and it is these Platonisms which profoundly form his own positions. Thomas' Classical Greek source for the philosophical treatment of justice is Aristotle, but what he takes from Aristotle is inserted within, and profoundly modified by, a systematic thinking which is shaped by the Neoplatonism of Plotinus (†270), Porphyry (†303), Iamblichus (†330), Proclus, and the pseudo-Dionysius.

In contrast, from its beginnings Arabic philosophy regards justice primarily within a tradition of commentary on Plato's *Republic*, a feature continued within Islamic thought to this day. Aristotle

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²On what of Plato it contained see Stephen Gersh, "The Medieval Legacy from Ancient Platonism," in *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) 3-30 at 9-10.

³See Aquinas, *Sentencia Libri De Sensu et Sensato*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Commissio Leonina: *Opera Omnia Sancti Thomae de Aquino* vol. 45, pars 2 (Rome / Paris, 1985) tract. 1, cap. 2, p. 19, lines 184 and 195 and W.J. Hankey, "Aquinas and the Platonists," in *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages* 279-324 at 289.

⁴For a complete treatment see my "Aquinas and the Platonists."

⁵See Dag Nikolaus Hasse, "Plato arabico-latinus: Philosophy-Wisdom-Occult Sciences," in *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages* 31-65 at 34-45.

is not influential on justice, and the Platonisms within which Aquinas placed his Aristotle make their mark in the Arabic world as well. Alain de Libera characterizes this *péripatétisme arabe* so as to show how Aristotle now conveys Platonism:

*Il n'y a plus à concilier Aristote et Platon, car Aristote lui-même a absorbé le platonisme, non plus certes le platonisme de Platon, mais celui du Plotinus Arabus et du Proclus Arabus. Le fruit de cette improbable assimilation est le péripatétisme arab.*⁶

Nonetheless, philosophical treatments of justice among those writing in Arabic in this period are more recognizable to present day students of Classical philosophy than are many of those of Aquinas or of the Neoplatonists. In the Arabic texts, justice seems primarily political, although the *polis* is one with the religious community, as it was for Plato also.

Our search backwards will be easier if we start with Al-Fârâbî. Those schooled in the thoughts of Plato about justice will recognise what he is doing, even if in common with Aquinas there are some strange features—with both Aquinas and Al-Fârâbî justice is first of all an attribute of God, indeed, God is identified with justice as also with the other divine attributes. Justice occurs at every level of reality—its political and even psychic existences are only its lowest manifestations. Al-Fârâbî does not tell us whence the peculiar ideas come, Aquinas will reveal their sources and complicate the picture. The most familiar feature of Al-Fârâbî's consideration of justice is that it occurs in a political work, *The Opinions of the People of the Virtuous City* or *The Perfect State* is clearly the product of someone who has read the *Republic* and wishes to update it both in light of the science of Aristotle where rational certainty is determined and the new religious situation. Al-Fârâbî's outline of the content and purpose of the *Republic* in *The Philosophy of Plato, Its Parts, the Ranks of Order of its Parts, from the Beginning to the End*,⁷ reveals his model. However, there are many alterations, for example, in virtue of the revelation made through The Prophet, the perfect city can be both universal and actual. The felicity, which life in accord with true philosophy gives, can be actualised for all humankind—according to the different human psychic types which, as also in Plato, determine their relation to rule and their function in the city. In contrast to the Classical Greeks, among the Islamic philosophers we are not dealing with a community judged to be peculiar to Hellenes.

A. THE JUSTICE OF THE PERFECT STATE

Al-Fârâbî is, after al-Kindi, the founder of the Arabic philosophical tradition. His cosmology, physics, biology, and psychology are Peripatetic, but the overall structure of his system and his theology are a monotheistically modified Neoplatonism. Allowing for different measures of each, and the vagueness of the terms, the same could be said for his successors who wrote in Arabic and who importantly influenced Aquinas: Ibn Sînâ (†1036, called Avicenna by the Latins), Moses Maimonides (1135-1204), and Ibn Rushd (†1198, for the Latins, “Averroes” and “The Commentator”).

⁶A. de Libera, *La querelle des universaux: De Platon à la fin du Moyen Age*, Des travaux (Paris: Seuil, 1996) 117 and see 68-124.

⁷Al-Fârâbî, *The Philosophy of Plato, Its Parts, the Ranks of Order of its Parts, from the Beginning to the End* in Al-Fârâbî's *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. with an introduction by Muhsin Madhi, revised edition (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969) viii, § 32, p. 65.

There are two general features of this philosophy which are important for us.

(1) As noted already, the Arabic philosophical tradition possessed and read the dialogues of Plato—thus distinguishing it from the Latin Mediaeval philosophic tradition in general. In his *The Philosophy of Plato*, Al-Fârâbî gives us a complete account of the dialogues.⁸ Among them, the *Republic* clearly determines political philosophy and it is still taught in the Islamic universities. The Arabs seem either not to have known, or not to have been interested in, Aristotle's *Politics*. Al-Fârâbî makes no mention of it in his *The Philosophy of Aristotle*.

(2) As a matter of emphasis, Islam and Judaism are less Hellenised than is Christianity. Their sacred scriptures remain in Arabic and Hebrew respectively and practice determined by law is primary. In contrast, the specific Christian Scripture is Greek, indeed, the version of the Jewish Scripture mostly used by the Patristic Church was Greek, and as Jaroslav Pelikan puts it: "It remains one of the most momentous linguistic convergences in the entire history of the human mind and spirit that the New Testament happens to have been written in Greek [...] the Greek of Socrates and Plato."⁹ The Church was fundamentally shaped in its war with the Hellenistic philosophical schools, especially the Neoplatonic ones.¹⁰ In comparison with Islam, the Church is more a theological community united by the doctrines in its creeds. In contrast in Al-Fârâbî's *The Opinions of the People of the Virtuous City* and *The Political Regime*, the good of the city depends directly and essentially on philosophy and also upon religious revelation. This has profound results for how and where justice appears.

The aim of *The Opinions of the People of the Virtuous City* is human happiness in this present life and immortality both of which depend upon justice. In Neoplatonic systems generally, the theoretical is subordinate to the practical so far as the aim is union with the divine. It is not, however, in virtue of a mystical conclusion that we are carried beyond philosophy as theory in this work by Al-Fârâbî. He tells us that his method here is "assertive" not theoretical, because his aim is not to prove theorems, but rather to describe the just order of the cosmos and the human with the purpose of manifesting the just order of the city where happiness is enabled. Known, the just order can be willed and actualised practically.

Justice first appears in Al-Fârâbî's summary of his book. After having outlined his treatment of the cosmos in eight chapters from the "First Cause," through the separate substances and the celestial bodies down to the sublunar natural material bodies, he writes that in the ninth chapter, he will consider:

How the continuous existence of each species of the natural material bodies is brought about, and how the individuals of each species remain in existence, in what way justice expresses itself in the manner in which these bodies are arranged; that whatever happens

⁸On what he knew of the dialogues and how he knew it see Dag Nikolaus Hasse, "Plato arabico-latinus," 32-34.

⁹Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism*, Gifford Lectures at Aberdeen, 1992-1993 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995) 3.

¹⁰Pierre Hadot, "La Fin du paganisme," reprinted in Pierre Hadot, *Études de philosophie ancienne*, L'ane d'or (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1998) 341-74.

with regard to these bodies happens with utmost justice, perfection and completeness; that there is neither injustice nor fault or defect in any of them.¹¹

Of the First he writes: “the First is just, and its justice is in its substance. This does not apply to anything apart from the first” (1.2.2). With all else justice has to do not with substance but with rank and order.

Setting out the opinions of the people of the virtuous city requires Al-Fârâbî to describe four kinds of reality: the divine, the cosmic, the human, and the political. Unless the order, or justice, which humans and the city must will in order to achieve felicity, is described, it cannot be the subject of rational choice. Rational choice is essential to justice at the level of the human soul, but justice exists at orders above the animated. The cosmos, both in its intelligible and in its visible structures, the human, both as soul and again as bodily organism, and the city, both in its head and in the hierarchical relation of those who govern and are governed, are images of the First. The images are connected and ordered. Ordered connections exist both between the intellectual, the rational, and the political, and within each. There is a relation of inner and outer between the intelligences and the visible heavenly substances, between the soul and the body, between the Philosopher-King and the parts of the city. Justice as the substance of the First, is present as rank and order in each of these forms (both in their inner and in their outer aspects) and in the relations between them.

For example, after describing the First, Al-Fârâbî describes its emanations. They begin with the ten immaterial intellects which follow in a line, one after the other, from the First:

But the substance of the First is also such that all the existents, when they emanate from it, are arranged in order of rank. [...] It starts with the most perfect existent and is followed by something a little less perfect than it. Afterwards it is followed successively by more and more deficient existents until the final stage of being is reached [...] [A]mong those which [...] arise out of the First those which are neither bodies nor in bodies are altogether more excellent [...].¹²

An outline of the bodily existences follows. Beginning in Chapter 10, and running through to Chapter 14, Al-Fârâbî produces an anthropology. Chapter 10 describes the faculties of the human soul “their ranks in relation to another; which of them only rules and which of them only serves, and which of them rules one thing and serves another, and which of them rules which.”¹³

In Chapter 13 (§7) the order in the human is set out:

Thus the nutritive faculty is made to be the servant of the body, and the faculties of sense and of representation are both made to serve the body and the rational faculty. All three

¹¹*Al-Fârâbî on the Perfect State. Abû Nasr al-Fârâbî's Mabâdi' ârâ' ahl al-madîna al-fâdila*, a revised text with introduction, translation, and commentary by R. Walzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) “Al-Fârâbî's Summary,” Chapter 9.

¹²*Ibid.* 1.2.2 and 3.6.2.

¹³*Ibid.* “Al-Fârâbî's Summary,” Chapter 10.

of them while serving the body are ultimately dependent on the rational faculty [...] practical reason is made to serve theoretical reason.

When felicity as known by the theoretical reason and is sought according to this order “the actions of man will be all good and noble” (3.13.7).

So far we have passed through the first three parts of Al-Fârâbî’s book. In the Fourth Part we come to the city and the realm of human will. There we discover that even as the “natural” human was ordered in accord with the cosmic existences which precede it, so, in the voluntary realm, “the excellent city resembles the perfect and healthy body.” Rank and subordination are essential in the city:

Its parts are different by nature, and their natural dispositions are unequal in excellence: there is in it a man who is the ruler, and there are others whose ranks are close to the ruler, each of them with a disposition and habit through which he performs an action in conformity with the intention of that ruler; these are the holders of the first ranks (4.15.4).

And so it goes, until we reach “the bottom of the scale.” In the next paragraphs, the right order of the city is first compared to the order of the organs in human body and then to the order of the cosmos: “For the relation of the First Cause to the other existents is like the relation of the king of the city to its other parts” (4.15.6). After reminding us of the cosmic order as described in the First Part of his treatise, Al-Fârâbî concludes: “The excellent city ought to be arranged in the same way: all its parts ought to imitate in their actions the aim of their first ruler according to their rank” (Ibid.)

Before turning to a brief consideration of Al-Fârâbî’s relation to Plato and Aristotle, I anticipate later parts of this essay by noting that his hierarchy shares an essential feature of that of the pseudo-Dionysius, insofar as the head of the hierarchy as a whole, and the heads of each of its distinct kinds, contain the orders which depend on them. This is true whether we are dealing with the First Cause in respect to the whole (4.15.6), reason in respect to the human (4.13.7), the heart in respect to the body (4.15.4), the ruler in respect to the city (4.15.5). Of the last of these he writes: “the ruler of the city is the most perfect part of the city in his specific qualification and has the best of everything which anybody else shares with him” (4.15.5). In the case of the ruler, this perfection stems from his unity with the hierarchy immediately above his own: “His soul is united as it were with the Active Intellect [...]” (4.15.11). Al-Fârâbî’s doctrine is usefully compared to that found in *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*:

[H]ierarchy and every hierarchy [...] has one and the same power throughout all its hierarchical endeavour, namely, the hierarch himself ... its being and proportion and order are in him divinely perfected and deified, and are then imparted to those below him according to their merit, whereas the sacred deification occurs in him directly from God. [...] Talk of “hierarch” and one is referring to a holy and inspired man, someone who understands all sacred knowledge, someone in whom an entire hierarchy is completely perfected and known.¹⁴

¹⁴*De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia* 1.2 and 1.3; PG 372D and 373C as translated by Colm Luibheid in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) 196-7.

This likeness is not surprising given that Al-Fârâbî and Arabic philosophy share many of the same Neoplatonic sources of this understanding of hierarchy with the pseudo-Dionysius, that the Dionysian *corpus* may have been known in the Arabic intellectual world, and that scholarship finds much in common between these two monotheistic modifications of Neoplatonism.¹⁵ Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Proclus mediate Plato for both Greek Christian and Arab Islamic recipients of the Hellenic tradition.

The perfect state of Al-Fârâbî clearly has the *Republic* of Plato as its model. For Plato, justice is an order of the parts in accord with a structural harmony; that harmony is primarily in the soul, and it is brought about in the city by an art dependent on knowledge possessed by the philosopher. Because of the need for education, bringing about justice in either soul or *polis* depends on a reciprocity between both. Justice can be defined and exists outside both soul and *polis* and must be known there, if it is to be brought into either. In the *Republic*, this knowledge is primarily a knowledge of the Forms and of the Good in relation to them. In the *Timaeus* Plato makes a connection between the ideal numbers and ratios according to which the soul is constructed and those according to which the physical image of the forms (i.e. the physical cosmos) is made. In consequence, the soul is able to know the whole of reality in obedience to the law that like is known by like. Thus, for Plato, justice might be found in the forms, in the soul, in the natural world, and in the city. Nonetheless, the system which gives these kinds of reality their character in Al-Fârâbî's perfect state owes more to Aristotle than to Plato.

Gerhard Endress tells us that Aristotle is “styled the First Teacher by Al-Fârâbî's school [...] relegating Plato to an inferior rank restricted to sharing out practical, political wisdom.”¹⁶ In Al-Fârâbî's world of Aristotelian theoretical sciences, where the forms have lost their separate existence and belong to intellects, justice outside the First is three-fold: in the order of the Primary existences of the universe, in the human, and in the city. Nonetheless, what is regarded as the Platonic physics, the *Timaeus*, is crucial to Plato's philosophy as Al-Fârâbî understands and retrieves it.

As Endress signals, the science of nature in the *Timaeus* is not what Al-Fârâbî retrieves from the dialogue. Rather, it plays two roles in “sharing out [...] wisdom.” First, the *Timaeus* provides the model for the relation of religion to the philosophy:

¹⁵G. Endress, “The New and Improved Platonic Theology. Proclus Arabus and Arabic Islamic Philosophy,” in *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne. Actes du Colloque International de Louvain (13-16 mai 1998) en l'honneur de H. D. Saffrey et L. G. Westerink*, édités par A. Ph. Segonds and C. Steel *Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, De Wulf-Mansion Centre, Series 1, XXVI (Leuven / Paris: Leuven University Press / Les Belles Lettres, 2000) 553-70 especially 565 with the references to the important works of Cristina D'Ancona-Costa among which we may mention “La doctrine de la creation ‘mediante intelligentia’ dans le *Liber de Causis* et dans ses sources,” *Revue des sciences théologiques et philosophiques*, 76 (1992): 209-233 and *La Casa della Sapienza. La trasmissione della metafisica greca e la formazione della filosofia araba* (Napoli: Edizione Angelo Guerini, 1996) 122-32; Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes [Super Librum De Causis Expositio]*, translated and annotated by V.A. Guagliardo, C.R. Hess, R.C. Taylor, introduction by V.A. Guagliardo, Thomas Aquinas in Translation 1 (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996) ix-xix; Pseudo-Dionigi l'Areopagita, *La Gerarchia Ecclesiastica*, Introduzione, traduzione e note a cura de Salvatore Lilla, Collana di Testi Patristici 166 (Roma: Città Nuova, 2002) 46 note 12; and René Roques, *L'Univers dionysien. Structure hiérarchique du monde selon le Pseudo-Denys*, Patrimoine christianisme (Paris: Cerf, 1983), 176-7 and *passim*.

¹⁶Endress, “The New and Improved Platonic Theology” 559.

Religion sets forth the images [of intellectual realities] by means of similitudes of them taken from corporeal principles, and imitates them by their likenesses among political offices. It imitates the divine acts by means of the functions of political offices. It imitates the actions of natural powers and principles by their likenesses among the faculties, states, and arts that have to do with the will, just as Plato does in the *Timaeus*.¹⁷

Al-Fârâbî notes in this context that, because religion has to do with imitation and persuasion, “philosophy is prior to religion in time.” Second, the *Timaeus* is presented as coming immediately after the *Republic*, “the city rendered perfect in speech.” It seems to represent the need for Aristotle’s sciences in the true city. Al-Fârâbî writes in his treatise on the attainment of happiness:

[Plato] presented in the *Timaeus* an account of the divine and natural beings, as they are perceived by the intellect and known by means of the sense, [he showed] what distinguishes the sciences that ought to be set up in that city, how everything that is not yet known will be inquired into and a comprehensive investigation of it will be made in that city [...] ¹⁸

These investigations are clearly what gives knowledge of the just order of the primary existents of the cosmos. The human soul and body, and the city, all of which are subordinate subjects of investigation, imitate that just order. The ordering principles are from Plato even if the sciences on which the actualization of the perfect city depends are from Aristotle.

At least one other parallel ought to be drawn between the *Republic* and Al-Fârâbî’s perfect state. For Al-Fârâbî, as for Plato, rule is an art, for Al-Fârâbî in the Platonic succession, the king who possesses “the art of ruling the excellent city”¹⁹ must be a philosopher. The foundation of the city depends on a human who is both philosopher and prophet, thus having the full development of both the rational and the representational parts of the soul. The combination of the two enables the universal actuality of the ideal city. After the city is founded by those who combine the complete development of both faculties, there may be a diminution of the quality of the ruler. However, the first characteristic of “the next sovereign, who is successor of the first sovereigns” is that “he will be a philosopher” (4.15.13). Only philosophy can rule this city:

When it happens, at a given time, that philosophy has no share in the government, though every other condition may be present in it, the excellent city will remain without a king, the ruler actually in charge of this city will not be a king, and the city will be on the verge of destruction; and if it happens that no philosopher can be found who will be attached to the actual ruler of the city, then, after a certain interval, this city will undoubtedly perish (4.15.14).

¹⁷Al-Fârâbî, *The Attainment of Happiness* in Al-Fârâbî’s *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. with an introduction by Muhsin Madhi, revised edition (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969) §55, p. 45.

¹⁸Al-Fârâbî, *The Philosophy of Plato* ix, §33, pp. 65-66.

¹⁹*Al-Fârâbî on the Perfect State* 4.15.7.

Philosophers are, at least in principle, also kings. Philosophy is prior to and contains what religion supplies. Just before the passage I quoted above from *The Attainment of Happiness* on the *Timaeus* as modelling the relation of religion to philosophy, Al-Fârâbî writes that the perfect philosopher enacts what he knows:

Therefore he who is truly perfect possesses with sure insight, first, the theoretical virtues, and subsequently, the practical. Moreover, he possesses what is required for bringing them about in nations and cities [...] it follows that the true philosopher is himself the supreme ruler.²⁰

I suppose that for contemporary philosophers, besides those features of the perfect state which adapt the *Republic* to the true revealed religion of the one God, the strangest idea is that “the First is just, and its justice is in its substance.” Aquinas has the same idea, but also knows that Aristotle opposes it. In addition, Thomas both knows where he got the idea and, in contrast to Al-Fârâbî, tells his readers. In consequence, we shall trace its source and meaning with him.

B. AQUINAS FOLLOWING PLOTINUS AND PORPHYRY: VIRTUE FOR GOD

Like Mediaeval philosophy generally, the *Summa Theologiae* is profitably read backwards. Beginning where it starts in the *de deo uno* renders the interpreter subject to the accusation of basing his or her argument in an abstract reason which will be overthrown when we get to the Christian God and Christian life. If the moral virtues, of which justice is counted as “cardinal”—along with prudence, temperance, and courage—play a role in the account of the life of grace, then, they are firmly established. One of the happier surprises awaiting a Neoplatonist working his way through the logic chopping questions comprising so much of the treatise on the Incarnation in the final part of the *Summa Theologiae*—the *Tertia Pars, de Christo*, which as the *reditus* of this system unites the *Prima Pars, de deo* and the *Secunda Pars, de homine*—is to find Plotinus cited with approval. When Thomas wants to show that Christ has virtues, he uses a schema he attributes to Plotinus according the report of the Late Ancient Latin Neoplatonist Macrobius.

The philosopher he finds referred to in the *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* as “Plotinus, inter philosophiae professores cum Platone princeps”²¹ helps demonstrate that “a heroic or divine *habitus* does not differ from virtue as it is commonly spoken of except that it is possessed in a more perfect mode.”²² What Aquinas takes as being from Plotinus enables a hierarchical community to be established between virtue in Christ and virtue in other humans so that grace can flow from him to them. Thomas’ conception of the operation of divine grace as deriving to humans through Christ’s humanity, “an instrument animated by a rational soul which is so acted upon as to act”,²³ continues his building up of the rational human, described at the beginning of

²⁰Al-Fârâbî, *The Attainment of Happiness* § 55, pp. 43-44.

²¹Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* 1-2.61.5 *sed contra*. When quoting the *Summa Theologiae*, I use the Ottawa, Piana edition of 1953.

²²*ST* 3.7.2 *ad* 2: *habitus ille heroicus vel divinus non differt a virtute communiter dicta nisi secundum perfectiorem modum.*

²³*ST* 3.7.1 *ad* 3: *humanitas Christi est instrumentum divinitatis, non quidem sicut instrumentum inanimatum, quod nullo modo agit sed solum agitur; sed tanquam instrumentum animatum anima rationali, quod ita agit quod etiam agitur.*

the *Secunda Pars* as “principle of its own works as having free will and power over its own works.”²⁴ Because the humanity of Christ is united to the divinity “through the medium of intelligence”,²⁵ “our union with God [by grace] is through activity according as we know and love him.”²⁶ Thomas tirelessly repeats: “Grace does not destroy nature but perfects it.”²⁷ Grace in Thomas strengthens the human rational power, freedom, and moral virtues. To establish this we may attend to the first occurrence of the doctrine he ascribes to Plotinus. This is found in the *Prima Secundae* in the treatment of the moral or cardinal virtues. There an entire article is devoted to the doctrine Thomas attributes to the founder of Neoplatonism and adopts as his own.

The article asks “Whether the cardinal virtues are fittingly divided into political, purgative, purified and exemplar virtues?” The schema is taken from the *In Somnium Scipionis*, which is among the earliest sources for Thomas’ knowledge of Neoplatonism. The text Macrobius, and, on his authority, Aquinas, ascribe to Plotinus is, in fact, from Porphyry.²⁸ He summarised and schematized what he found in Plotinus “On Virtues,”²⁹ but, as his editing and ordering of the *Enneads* themselves shows, Porphyry’s schema are by no means doctrinally indifferent. Aquinas wholeheartedly adopts it as his own. It fits into, because it belongs to, a logic essential to Thomas’ thought which, like the schema Macrobius transmits, also derives from Porphyry’s *Sententiae ad intelligibilia ducentes*, intended to supplement the *Enneads*. The *sententia* “All things are in all things but everything is accommodated to the *ousia* of each knower: in the intellect according to *noerôs*, in the soul rationally (*logismôs*) [...]” has become the general principle in Aquinas: “a thing is received according to the mode of the receiver (*receptum est in recipiente per modum recipientis*).”³⁰ Aquinas did not find the principle in Porphyry, but it was in many of his Neoplatonic sources, including the pseudo-Dionysius (6th century), Boethius, and the *Liber de causis* (circa 850).³¹ In his commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, written at about the same time as the *Prima Secundae*, he opines that Plato knew the principle: “Plato saw that each thing is received in something else according to the capacity of the recipient (*unumquodque recipitur in aliquo secundum mensuram recipientis*).”³² This figure relating ontology and

²⁴ST 1-2, prologus: *ipse est suorum operum principium, quasi liberum arbitrium habens et suorum operum potestatem.*

²⁵ST 3.6.2 *corpus: per medium intellectum.*

²⁶ST 3.6.6 *ad 1: unio nostra ad Deum est per operationem, in quantum scilicet eum cognoscimus et amamus.*

²⁷For example at ST 1.1.8 *ad 2.*

²⁸For what Thomas cites as being in fact from Porphyry’s *Sententiae ad intelligibilia ducentes*, see Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. W.H. Stahl, Records of Civilization, Sources and Studies 48 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952) 121, note 3 and S. Gersh, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism: The Latin Tradition*, 2 vol., Notre Dame Studies in medieval studies 23 (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1986) ii, 508-509, note 91. For a discussion see J.P. Hochschild, “Porphyry, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas: A Neoplatonic Hierarchy of Virtues and Two Christian Appropriations,” *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism and Christianity*, edited by John Inglis (Richmond [England]: Curzon Press, 2002) 245-259 and my “Philosophy as Way of Life for Christians? Iamblichan and Porphyrian Reflections on Religion Virtue and Philosophy in Thomas Aquinas,” *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 59:2 [Le Néoplatonisme] (Juin 2003): 193-224 at 205-210.

²⁹*Ennead* 1.2; I use the text in Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. A.H. Armstrong, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass./London: Harvard, 1966-1988)

³⁰Porphyry, *Sententiae ad Intelligibilia Ducentes*, ed E. Lamberz (Leipzig: Teubner, 1975) c. 10; Aquinas, ST 1.84.1 *corpus.*

³¹“See Hankey, “Aquinas and the Platonists,” at 308-309 and 321-322.

³²Aquinas, *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Expositio*, ed. M.R. Cathala and R.M. Spiazzi (Turin/Rome: Marietti, 1964) cap. 1, lect. 10, §167, p. 48.

subjectivity (and, in the doctrine of analogy, predication), is well established in the most important theological and philosophical authorities for Thomas. Moreover, it fits with, and is reinforced by, another fundamental structural principle which Aquinas adopts from Porphyry's pupil Iamblichus.

This principle comes to be known as the *Lex divinitatis*, the requirement for complete mediation. Aquinas, following Dionysius who had it from Proclus,³³ supposes that this law, requiring that all movements between extremes in a hierarchy must pass by mediating steps, applies to all the operations of God, both natural and gracious. The human power and mode of knowing is situated midway in a hierarchy; the most revealing and determinative account of the universe is as a hierarchy of cognitive powers where we have the animals below us and all the ranks of angels above.³⁴ This schema limits the human but, nonetheless, gives it a determined place, character, and power. There is no abolition or absorption into the angelic or divine, nor, for Aquinas, a dissolution of the difference between philosophy, which belongs to our natural powers, and sacred doctrine, which depends upon what is beyond these. In consequence, the Porphyrian schema attributed to Plotinus for ordering the virtues to the various levels of subjectivity is firmly grounded.

Thomas continued to use what he attributes to Plotinus in his *Quaestio Disputata de Virtutibus Cardinalibus*, which was completed at the end of this period (1271-72).³⁵ Macrobius is not, however, his only Neoplatonic source for this hierarchical ordering of the virtues. When, in the *Prima Secundae*, Thomas asks "Whether there is *habitus* in the angels?", in order to give an affirmative answer, he turns to the *Commentary on the Categories of Aristotle* by Simplicius. There he finds that "Wisdom which is a habit in the soul, is substance in intellect. For all divine realities are sufficient to themselves and exist in themselves." And, "the habits of intellectual substances are not like those habits here, but they more like simple and immaterial forms which the substance contains in itself."³⁶ In this article, Simplicius is found to accord with Maximus the Confessor (†662) and with the pseudo-Dionysius. Further, in the same place, the principle by

³³Dominic O'Meara, "Évêques et philosophes-rois: Philosophie politique néoplatonicienne chez le Pseudo-Denys," in *Denys l'Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident, Actes du Colloque International Paris, 21-24 septembre 1994*, édité par Ysabel de Andia, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 151 (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1997) 75-88 at 79, he cites *Elements of Theology* proposition 132.

³⁴See W.J. Hankey, "Aquinas, Pseudo-Denys, Proclus and Isaiah VI.6," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 64 (1997): 59-93 and Houston Smit, "Aquinas's Abstractionism," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10 (2001): 85-118 at 97-103.

³⁵Aquinas, *Quaestio Disputata de Virtutibus Cardinalibus* in *Quaestiones Disputatae*, 2 vols. (Turin/Rome: Marietti, 1965) ii, 1.2.

³⁶*ST* 1-2.50.6 *corpus*: "*Sapientia quae est in anima, habitus est; quae autem in intellectu, substantia. Omnia enim quae sunt divina, et per se sufficientia sunt, et in seipsis existentia.*" and "*habitus intellectualis substantiae non sunt similes his qui sunt hic habitibus, sed magis sunt similes simplicibus et immaterialibus speciebus quas continet in seipsa.*" Simplicius, *Commentaire sur les Catégories d'Aristote, Traduction de Guillaume de Moerbeke*, ed. A. Patin, 2 vols., *Corpus Latinorum commentariorum in Aristotelem Graecorum* 1-2 (vol. 1, Louvain/Paris, 1971, vol. 2 Leiden, 1975), De Qualitate, ii, pp. 330-331, lines 81-94. This *Commentary* is also employed elsewhere for understanding dispositions, see Vivian Boland, "Aquinas and Simplicius on Dispositions - A Question in Fundamental Moral Theory," *New Blackfriars* 82: 968 (October 2001): 467-478; for Thomas' use of Simplicius more generally, see W. J. Hankey, "Thomas' Neoplatonic Histories: His following of Simplicius," *Dionysius* 20 (2002): 153-178.

which the mode of a rational substance and the mode of its acts are brought into agreement is derived from the *Liber de causis*: “so far as it is in act, [an intellectual substance] is able to understand some things through its own essence, at least itself, and other things according to the mode of its own substance.”³⁷

The doctrine which both Aquinas (and his 13th century rival, Bonaventure) derive from Porphyry in opposition to Aristotle (for whom, as Aquinas tells us, to attribute political virtues to God is ridiculous.³⁸) enables the moral virtues of prudence, temperance, courage, and justice to be attributed in different modes to God, angels, and humans, to different states and stages of human life, and to different powers of action. The net result is that Aquinas can move on in *Quaestio* 62 to the theological or infused virtues of faith, hope, and charity, without reducing what is below to what is above. As Joshua Hochschild puts it:

it allows us to understand how human “lives” that can be differentiated can still be necessarily related: the political and the contemplative man are engaged in different activities, but both are engaged in human activities, and so the same virtues are actualized in them according to different modes.³⁹

Having established that what Aquinas takes from Macrobius enables the real practice of justice as a natural moral virtue, we may begin the direct consideration of Porphyry’s schema by remembering that human virtues are better founded as natural in Aquinas than in Plotinus.

C. PORPHYRY’S SCHEMA

Plotinus is not the friend of the human or of human virtue. He wrote of the good man:

[He] will altogether separate himself, as far as possible from his lower nature and will not live the life of the good man which civic virtue requires. He will leave that behind, and choose another, the life of the gods: for it is to them, not to the good men, that we are to be made like.⁴⁰

The mystical union for which Plotinus aims does not come at the will, or by the power of the philosophy which prepares for it. Pierre Hadot describes what the One gives, for which we can only wait, as the irruption in the consciousness: “fait en quelque sorte exploser la conscience [...] on a l’impression d’appartenir à un autre.”⁴¹ The end for which philosophy strives is, in many ways, the very opposite of its modes: union is given; it is not our work; it is beyond our power; there is the loss of self and of control; in the union we cannot have rational consciousness; any description of the union is subsequent and in terms which cannot be true to its mode.

³⁷ST 1-2.50.6 *corpus*: *inquantum est actu, per essentiam suam potest aliqua intelligere, ad minus seipsum, et alia secundum modum suae substantiae [...] et tanto perfectius, quanto est perfectior.*

³⁸ST 1-2.61.5 *obj.* 1 and *ad* 1; on Bonaventure in *Collationes in Hexaemeron* 6, see Hochschild, “Porphyry, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas,” 248-29.

³⁹Hochschild, “Porphyry, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas,” 253.

⁴⁰*Ennead* 1.2.7, 23-28, p. 146.

⁴¹Plotin, *Traité* 9: VI, 9, Introduction, traduction commentaire et notes par Pierre Hadot, Les *Écrits de Plotin* publiés dans l’ordre chronologique (Paris: Cerf, 1994) 48. See also his Plotin, *Traité* 38: VI, 7, Introduction, traduction commentaire et notes par Pierre Hadot, Les *Écrits de Plotin* publiés dans l’ordre chronologique (Paris: Cerf, 1988).

This kind of description of the ultimate end sought by philosophy moves Jean-Marc Narbonne to ask if there is, in Neoplatonism: “un abandon du terrain propre de la philosophie.”⁴² In Neoplatonism after Plotinus, there is a restoration of the human and of the human virtues which philosophy requires and supports. This was emphatically undertaken by Iamblichus who is altogether concerned with keeping the levels of spiritual reality distinct. Philosophy works with what the human can do within the limits given to it. Gregory Shaw writes:

There is in Iamblichus’s Platonism a willingness to *identify* with the humiliation of the human condition [...] Damascius’s companion Isidore once remarked, after meeting a pretentious philosopher: “*Those who would be Gods must first become human!*” For the hieratic Platonists the limits of our humanity must be fully realised in order to recover our lost divinity.⁴³

Aquinas is an heir via Dionysius of the Iamblichan law of total mediation which effects this humanization, by carefully and completely differentiating the levels of subjectivity. Equally, he inherits one of the consequences of the *Lex divinitatis*, Iamblichus’ establishment of philosophy, natural virtues, and human freedom by limiting them *vis-à-vis* religion and the grace of the gods which raise us beyond what the human soul and intellect can reach. Porphyry’s schematization of Plotinus on the virtues stands half way between Plotinus and Iamblichus.⁴⁴

Porphyry’s first distinction corresponds to the two kinds of complete happiness set out by Aristotle at the end of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and is between “one set of virtues which belongs to the citizen, another which belong to the one who ascends toward contemplation.”⁴⁵ The political virtues aim at action and “a social organization which shall not inflict injury upon its members” (23:4-8). In this sphere justice is “the simultaneous limiting of each of these [the other cardinal virtues: prudence, courage and temperance] to its own sphere of action, in respect to ruling and being ruled” (23:11-12).

The aim of the purgative virtues leading to contemplation is contradistinguished from the political, which aim at “moderation of passion [...] so that a human can live in accord with nature.” The purifying virtues seek “*apatheia*, whose end is assimilation to god” (25:6-9). At this second level of the way up:

⁴²Jean-Marc Narbonne, “EPEKEINA THS GNWSEWS, le savoir d’au-delà à savoir chez Plotin et dans la tradition néoplatonicienne,” *Metaphysik und Religion* (München – Leipzig: K. G. Saur, 2001) 477-490 at 487.

⁴³Gregory Shaw, “After Aporia: Theurgy in Later Platonism,” *The Journal of Neoplatonic Studies* 5:1 (1996): 3-41 at 41.

⁴⁴For outlines the steps of the development (which do not treat Porphyry) see Dominic J. O’Meara, “Aspects of Political Philosophy in Iamblichus,” in *The Divine Iamblichus. Philosopher and Man of Gods*, ed. H.J. Blumental & E.G. Clark, (London: Duckworth, 1993), 65-73 and idem, “Vie politique et divinisation dans la philosophie néoplatonicienne,” *SOFIHS MAIHTOPES Chercheurs de sagesse. Hommage à Jean Pépin*, publié sous la direction de Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé, Goulven Madec, Denis O’Brien, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 131 (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1992), 501-10.

⁴⁵Porphyry, *Sententiae* 32: p. 22 (Lamberz, 1975): lines 14-15; I use a translation by Thomas Davidson in the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 3 (1869): 46-73, which I modify.

prudence is not to opine with the body but *energein* only [...] freedom from sympathy with the body constitutes temperance, not to fear when withdrawing from the body, as if it were into something empty and non-being, constitutes courage. [...] And when reason and intellect lead nothing opposes, this is justice (24.9-25.6).

Beyond these virtues belonging to soul, there are those of a life where Aristotle does not allow virtue at all, namely, the realm of intellect, a region humans do not properly understand while we are in the body of this present life. Here wisdom is contemplation, courage is *apatheia*, and “justice is minding one’s own business [*oikeiopragia* (see Plato, *Republic* 434C, Plotinus, *Ennead* 1.2.7)] in the progress toward *nous*, and it is to act in intellect [*to pros noun energein*]” (27.9-28.4). Above these virtues of actual intellect are the exemplary virtues within *nous*, the paradigms of the lower habits. Here “wisdom is *nous* thinking; temperance is self-relatedness [*to de pros auton*]”; justice is “minding one’s own business within one’s proper sphere [*to de oikeion energon hē oikeiopragia*]” (29: 4-7). This rather strange language, which derives from Plato and Plotinus, has the advantage of preserving a recollection of the social character of justice within the way it exists according to the activity of *nous*. Aquinas, who has his Porphyry through a commentary on Cicero represented as dreaming about the ideal commonwealth, will intensify this divine foundation of political life. For Porphyry the first two levels of virtue belong to the human, the third to the gods, the fourth inheres in “the father of the gods [*theōn patēr*]” (31:4-8). As humans we cannot possess what the gods and the father of the gods have, we participate their virtues politically and in striving toward contemplation.

Whereas Porphyry and Macrobius start from the soul and move up to the gods, Aquinas starts with God on the authority of Augustine, “because the exemplar of human virtue must pre-exist in God (*quod exemplar humanae virtutis in Deo praeexistit*).” The divine exemplar of justice is “the observance of the eternal law in his own works as Plotinus says (*iustitia vero Dei est observatio legis aeternae in suis operibus, sicut Plotinus dixit*).”⁴⁶ From the exemplary, Aquinas moves to political virtues belonging to the human, who, Aquinas says, following Aristotle and Macrobius, is “a political animal according to his own nature (*secundum suam naturam est animal politicum*).”⁴⁷ With his Iamblichan sense of the need for complete mediation, Aquinas demands that there must be some virtues between these extremes: virtues in “the middle between (*medias inter*)” the human and the divine virtues. These differ according to diversity of motions and of terms. Some are on the way to perfection, which is likeness to God (*divina similitudine*), these are the purifying virtues (*virtutes purgatoriae*). There fortitude “prevents the soul from being afraid of moving away from the body and rising to heavenly things. Justice as purifying virtue consists in the whole soul consenting to the way thus proposed (*fortitudinis autem est ut anima non terreatur propter excessum a corpore, et accessum ad superna; iustitia vero est ut tota anima consentiat ad huiusmodi propositi viam*)”⁴⁸ by prudence, which “despises all worldly things by contemplating the divine things (*prudencia omnia mundana divinorum contemplatione*

⁴⁶ ST 1-2.61.5; compare Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius, *Commentarius in Somnium Scipionis*, ed. Jacob Willis (Teubner, 1994) 1.8, 10: *iustitia quod perenni lege a sempiterna operis sui continuatione non flectitur*.

⁴⁷ ST 1-2.61.5; compare Macrobius, *Commentarius* 1.8, 5: *quattuor sunt inquit quaternarum genera virtutum, ex his primae politicae vocantur [...]. et sunt politicae hominis, qua sociale animal est*.

⁴⁸ ST 1-2.61.5; compare Macrobius, *Commentarius* 1.8, 4: *fortitudinis non terri animam a corpore quodam modo ductu philosophiae recedentem, nec altitudinem perfectae ad superna ascensionis horrere; iustitiae ad unam sibi huius propositi consentire viam unius cuiusque virtutis obsequium*.

despiciat).⁴⁹ The virtues in the step above these have been removed, by Macrobius and Aquinas, from the gods where Porphyry placed them. They now become what belongs to those in the divine likeness, those already purified. There “prudence only intuits divine things (*prudentia sola divina intueatur*),”⁵⁰ and justice “by imitating the divine mind is in a social life with it by an everlasting covenant (*iustitiae cum divina mente perpetuo foedere societur, eam scilicet imitando*).”⁵¹ This is the promised community of the saints in the city of God or of “some of the most perfect in this life.”⁵²

By maintaining the language of law, of covenant, and of society at the highest level (repeating exactly the language of Macrobius which greatly strengthens some of Porphyry’s language), Aquinas ensures that the exemplary virtues will found political life at the human level. This is reflected in his replies to objections. In the *ad tertium* he cites Cicero in order to show that “the neglect of human affairs when necessity requires is vicious (*vitiosum*).” In the *ad quartum* he shows that only *iustitia legalis* regards the communal good directly, but “by commandment it draws all the other virtues to the service of the common good (*per imperium omnes alias virtutes ad bonum commune trahit*).”⁵³ Importantly, this last argument is attributed to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* by Aquinas. Ultimately, for Aquinas, the Neoplatonic framework is not only compatible with Aristotle’s ethics, it, in fact, provides it with an absolute foundation.⁵⁴

D. AQUINAS FOLLOWING DIONYSIUS, IAMBlichUS AND PROCLUS: GOD’S SUBSTANCE IS JUSTICE

Reasoning which is simultaneously Aristotelian and Neoplatonic appears when Aquinas asks “Whether there is justice in God?”⁵⁵ Aquinas begins with a distinction borrowed from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* between distributive and commutative justice and worked out there in terms of equality understood through proportion.⁵⁶ In Aristotelian terms, God’s justice is distributive, not commutative. Despite Aristotle’s assertion that it is ridiculous to praise God for good citizenship, because justice belongs to the will, not to the sensitive part of the soul, for Aquinas, God may have this virtue.⁵⁷ The interesting moment in the article comes at the end of the *respondeo* when the authority of Dionysius, whose *De Divinis Nominibus* Aquinas is reiterating (and profoundly modifying) in this treatise, *de deo uno*, is invoked:

Just as the right order of a family or of any kind of governed multitude is demonstrated in the distributive justice of the one who governs, so also the order of the universe, manifested both in natural and moral beings, sets forth God’s justice. Accordingly,

⁴⁹[⁴⁹] *ST* 1-2.61.5; compare Macrobius, *Commentarius* 1.8, 4: *prudentiae esse mundum istum et omnia quae mundo insunt divinatorum contemplatione despiciere*.

⁵⁰ *ST* 1-2.61.5; compare Macrobius, *Commentarius* 1.8, 9: *illic prudentiae est divina non quasi in electione praeferre, sed sola nosse, et haec tamquam nihil sit aliud intueri*.

⁵¹ *ST* 1-2.61.5; compare Macrobius, *Commentarius* 1.8, 9: *iustitiae ita cum superna et divina mente sociari ut servet perpetuum cum ea foedus imitando*.

⁵² *ST* 1-2.61.5 *corpus*: *Quas quidem virtutes dicimus esse beatorum, vel aliquorum in hac vita perfectissimorum*.

⁵³ *ST* 1-2.61.5 *ad 3 et ad 4*.

⁵⁴ See Hochschild, “Porphyry, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas,” 253.

⁵⁵ *ST* 1.21.1.

⁵⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 5.3 1131b9-10.

⁵⁷ *ST* 1.21.1 *corpus* and *ad 1*.

Dionysius says: “We ought to see that God is truly just in that he grants what is proper to all things according to the rank of each of them and preserves the nature of each one in the order and with the powers that properly belong to it.”⁵⁸

Distributive justice now rules the universe ordered from the top down. The self-relation we observed already with Porphyry at the level of intellectual life comes out here in the *ad tertium*: “God’s justice has to do with what befits him, inasmuch as he renders to himself what is his due (*iustitia Dei respicit decentiam ipsius secundum quam reddit sibi quod sibi debetur*).” Outside the divinity itself this self-relation demands order, each must have what is due to it in a hierarchical order: “to each is due what is ordained for it in the order of the divine wisdom (*quia hoc unicuique debetur quod est ordinatum ad ipsum secundum ordinem divinae sapientiae*).”⁵⁹

The self-relation, need for hierarchical order, and the deep conservatism of this notion of justice comes out in the text of Dionysius: “The justice of God orders everything, sets boundaries, keeps things distinct and unconfused, giving each what it inherently deserves (*tattei, kai horothetei, kai panta apo pantōn amigē kai asumphurta diasōzousa*).”⁶⁰ The name Justice becomes the name “the Salvation of the whole” because “it ensures that each being (*idian hekastou*) is preserved and maintained in its proper being and order, distinct from everything else.”⁶¹ Ultimately, Justice is “that by which the equality (*isotē*) of all things is measured and defined.”⁶² Equality, in particular, and numerical order, in general, underlie the idea of justice, and Aquinas in his commentary on the *Divine Names* finds Aristotle and Dionysius in accord.

Thomas’ *Exposition of the Divine Names* is agreed to have been written just prior to or during his writing of the *Summa Theologiae*;⁶³ anyone reading it will be able to anticipate his treatment of God’s justice in the *Summa*. Aquinas understands Dionysius as if he were operating within the Porphyrian schema—justice belongs within the consideration of virtues in God. Here, however, Aquinas gives Aristotelian reasons for maintaining that justice is the only moral virtue which is found in God where it concerns distributions and retributions, the others “concern passions (*sunt circa passiones*).”⁶⁴ Distributive (not commutative) justice is attributed to God according to the equality not of number but of proportion (*aequalitas proportionis*). In the course of his exposition Aquinas writes as if he had been reading the *Republic* of Plato and applying what he learned there to the universe as a whole. Justice “distributes to different things diversely (*distribuat diversa diversis*),” “lest one might presume to usurp to himself what belongs to another (*ne scilicet unus id quod est alterius sibi usurpare praesumat*).”⁶⁵ The action of justice is

⁵⁸ *Ibid. corpus*: *Sicut igitur ordo congruus familiae vel cuiuscumque multitudinis gubernatae, demonstrat huiusmodi iustitiam in gubernante; ita ordo universi, qui apparet tam in rebus naturalibus quam in rebus voluntariis, demonstrat Dei iustitiam. Unde dicit Dionysius, VIII cap. De Div. Nom.: “Oportet videre in hoc veram Dei esse iustitiam, quod omnibus tribuit propria, secundum uniuscuiusque existentium dignitatem; et uniuscuiusque naturam in proprio salvat ordine et virtute.”*

⁵⁹ *Ibid. ad 3.*

⁶⁰ Dionysius, *De Divinis Nominibus* 8.7 PG 896A.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 8 PG 896D.

⁶² *Ibid.* 8 PG 897B

⁶³ In general I rely on the dating given in G. Emery, “Bref catalogue des oeuvres de saint Thomas,” in J.-P. Torrell, *Initiation à saint Thomas d’Aquin. Sa personne et son oeuvre*, Pensée antique et médiévale, Vestigia 13 (Paris / Fribourg: Cerf / Editions Universitaires de Fribourg, 1993) 483-525.

⁶⁴ Aquinas, *In librum Beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio*, ed. C. Pera (Turin/ Rome, Marietti, 1950) 8.4 §771, p. 291.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 8.4 §776, p. 292.

“that each should do what is proper to itself (*actus iustitiae est ut unusquisque id quod est sibi conveniens operetur*).”⁶⁶

The means of Thomas’ reversion to the idea of justice in the *Republic*, a work he did not know, by way of Dionysius and Aristotle, is doubtless the Neoplatonic tradition which was common to him and to Al-Fârâbî. Dominic O’Meara, almost the only scholar to have written on the place of the political virtues in the Neoplatonic schools of late Antiquity, has shown the very large extent to which the ecclesiastical hierarch of Dionysius is modelled on the Philosopher-King of Plato and concludes a study on the political philosophy of Dionysius thus:

*Admettons que les idées de la République de Platon soient transmises au Pseudo-Denys par des interprétations néoplatoniciennes. Il en découle que la République exerçait une influence non négligeable dans les écoles néoplatoniciennes; que l’on s’y référerait pour élaborer une description des premières étapes, éthiques et politiques, de l’assimilation de l’âme au divin; que l’on intégrait dans le parcours de ces étapes les principes de base de la cité idéale platonicienne, le principe de la justice, la structure dyadique de l’État, les philosophes-rois, l’action politique à l’image de modèles divins.*⁶⁷

O’Meara has shown that the ideas he lists are general in the schools from Iamblichus onward. In consequence, both Al-Fârâbî and Aquinas are dealing with cosmic structure in its connection to the *itinerarium* of the soul in a way which is characteristic of Iamblichus conveyed by Proclus, who certainly influenced them directly and indirectly.⁶⁸ The Chapter of the *Divine Names* which follows that on justice continues along the lines of its reflections on equality. In the language of Aquinas, it treats: *De Parvo, Magno, Altero, Simili, Dissimili, Statione, Sessione, Motu, Aequalitate*. About its names for God, Henry-Dominique Saffrey notes: “great and small, identical and different, like and unlike, motionless and moving [...] characteristics which Proclus had himself selected when he had pulled them out of his own exegesis of the *Parmenides*.”⁶⁹ Thomas’ comment regarding Dionysius on equality as a name of God reiterates much of what he says about justice but emphasises its basis in the divine nature:

If therefore unity is attributed to God according to his own nature, God is said to be equal by reason of the divine unity, which is understood in accord with his simplicity, because he is not composed out of many things, and in accord with his immobility, because he always possesses himself in the same way.⁷⁰

Equality is a characteristic both of the trinitarian processions and of God’s relation to creatures. With respect to the first, it is necessary that what proceeds be equal to its principle.⁷¹ Equality as a characteristic is also especially appropriated to the Word as the first emanation from the Father

⁶⁶ Ibid. 8.4 §777, p. 292.

⁶⁷ O’Meara, “Évêques et philosophes-rois,” 88. See also the Lilla’s Introduction to his translation of *La Gerarchia Ecclesiastica*, especially 25.

⁶⁸ On Aquinas, see Hankey, “Aquinas and the Platonists,” and idem, “Thomas’ Neoplatonic Histories”: 161-64.

⁶⁹ H.-D. Saffrey, “Les débuts de la théologie comme science (IIIe-VIe)” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 80:2 (Avril, 1996) 219, English translation W.J. Hankey, “Theology as science (3rd-6th centuries),” *Studia Patristica*, XXIX, ed. E.A. Livingstone (Leuven: Peeters, 1997) 332-33 at 338.

⁷⁰ Aquinas, *In Dionysii De divinis nominibus* 9.4 §844, p. 317: *Si ergo ista unitas attribuitur Deo secundum seipsum, dicetur Deus esse aequalis ratione unitatis divinae; quae attenditur et secundum Eius simplicitatem, quia non est compositus ex multis et secundum immobilitatem, quia semper eodem modo se habet.*

who is the principle of the Trinitarian processions: *Aequalitas autem importat unitatem [...] Et ideo aequalitas appropriatur Filio, qui est principium de principio* (ST 1.39.8).

The first thing which proceeds from unity is equality and then multiplicity proceeds. And, therefore, from the Father, to whom, according to Augustine, unity is proper, the Son processes, to whom equality is appropriate, and then the creature comes forth to which inequality belongs.⁷¹

In respect to the second, creatures, equality means that “all things receive the influence of the divine working (*omnia recipiunt influentiam divinae operationis*).”⁷² We may say then that justice as equality determines both the structure of the divine life and of creation.

In determining justice according to a mathematical principle which begins to operate at the level of the divine, Aquinas would seem to follow Iamblichus of whom O’Meara writes:

[W]e may conclude that political philosophy had a place for him in philosophy, occupying, as a practical science, a position subordinate to the theoretical science that is mathematics (from which it receives its paradigms) and concerning itself with cities, constitutions, the organization of actions, the promotion of equality, agreement, the moral improvement and the good in general of citizens.⁷³

CONCLUSION

We could go on with Aquinas, as we did with Al-Fârâbî to look at what he said concerning strictly human justice, which is far more straightforwardly Aristotelian.⁷⁴ Doing so, however, would not bring out what is distinctive in the considerations of justice in late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The thinkers we have considered are characteristic of others in their periods because ultimately, as with Plato himself in the *Republic*, what is prior to the *polis*, more substantial, and of deeper concern in respect to justice is the soul and its immortal existence. Our consideration reminds us that the *Republic* looks at the *polis* in order to see the soul better. Moreover, as the *Myth of Er* indicates, the aim of the whole discourse is that we should learn to choose rightly because the choices of souls—which Socrates proves to be immortal just before the *Myth* is told—may have endlessly long consequences.⁷⁵ The intelligible, the cosmos, and the human are bound together in Plato and his successors, as this by O’Meara concerning the *Commentary on the Timaeus* of Proclus points out:

Political theory is both inferior and superior to physical theory: it is inferior in that it concerns the organization of human affairs whereas physics deals with a larger order; it is

⁷¹ ST 1.47.2 ad 2: *primum quod procedit ab unitate est aequalitas, et deinde procedit multiplicitas. Et ideo a Patre, cui, secundum Augustinum, appropriatur unitas, processit Filius, cui appropriatur aequalitas, et deinde creatura, cui competit inaequalitas.*

⁷² Aquinas, *In Dionysii De divinis nominibus* 9.4 §844, p. 317.

⁷³ O’Meara, “Aspects of Political Philosophy in Iamblichus,” 66.

⁷⁴ See e.g. ST 2-2.58.

⁷⁵ See Ronald R. Johnson, “Does Plato’s *Myth of Er* Contribute to the Argument of the *Republic*,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 32:1 (1999): 1-13.

superior in that a political order already exists in intelligible reality. The ideal city pre-exists in the intelligible, and exists in the heavens and (lastly) in human lives. Thus Plato's *Republic* precedes his *Timaeus*, although it concerns a moral order inferior to the perfect order of the universe. If politics occupies a lower place in the structure of philosophy, it derives its principles nevertheless from a transcendent level of reality, intelligible immaterial being.⁷⁶

Mutatis mutandis these words apply equally to Al-Fârâbî and Aquinas. Justice in the Neoplatonic traditions of late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, including those which have assimilated or been assimilated to Aristotelianism, is found in every kind of reality at every level because it is an attribute of the Divine.

⁷⁶ O'Meara, "Aspects of Political Philosophy in Iamblichus," 67. I regret that I have only seen Dominic O'Meara's *Platonopolis: Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003) after this essay was already in press; it suffers as a result.