

Participatio divini luminis,
Aquinas' doctrine of the Agent Intellect:
Our Capacity for Contemplation¹

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In 2001 two works in English reconsidered Thomas' teaching on the human intellectual light and endeavoured a reconciliation between his self-conscious following of Aristotle, on the one hand, and Augustinian intellectual intuition, on the other. Both works emphasise that the human light is a *participatio divini luminis*, but their methods and purposes are diverse. I shall use them to supplement one another. The first by John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock raises important new possibilities for interpreting Aquinas, but its postmodern representation of his doctrine is seriously deficient. The second by Houston Smit gives the careful analysis of Thomas' texts which the new interpretation requires, and is worth considering at length.² Analysis is not, however, enough for our purposes, we also seek sources. The Smit has not looked into these. The third and fourth parts of my paper will suggest some of them, beginning with Latin and Arabic origins of Thomas' teaching. Then, we shall plunge more deeply into the Greek Neoplatonic springs which supply the rivers in which medieval theologians swim. To conclude I shall consider the consequence of my investigation for the question of the continuity between our natural knowing and the beatific contemplation of God.

1. This paper was presented at *Synderèse et Contemplation: sources anciennes, enjeux modernes. Journée d'études* under the direction of Ph. Hoffmann et Ch. Trottmann at L'Université François-Rabelais, Tours, Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance, with the cooperation of the Centre d'Études des Religions du Livre and of the Collège International de Philosophie, Paris, on 6 June 2003. A French translation will be published in the acts of the conference, *Vers la contemplation*, édité par Ch. Trottmann, collection *Le savoir de Mantice* (Paris: Honoré Champion).

2. Regrettably Smit has not attended to the literature on the change in Thomas' thought on the agent intellect, for this see Édouard-Henri Weber, *Dialogue et dissensions entre saint Bonaventure et saint Thomas d'Aquin à Paris (1252–1273)*, Bibliothèque thomiste 41 (Paris: Vrin, 1974): 253ff.

I. AN INTELLECTUAL INTUITION OF GOD?

Of *Truth in Aquinas* by John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock,³ Fergus Kerr notes that it has received “almost ludicrously incompatible interpretations.” He seems to favour the *compte rendu* by Adrian Pabst in the *Revue thomiste*. It judges that *Truth in Aquinas* marks “une importante percée dans les études thomistes” in virtue of “a very successful attempt to bring out the contemporary relevance of Thomas’s positions for our (postmodern) questions” [I quote Kerr quoting Pabst].⁴ In fact, Pickstock and Milbank are aiming to move Aquinas’ Aristotelian abstractionism into intellectual intuition and Augustinian illumination for the sake of finding a way around Kant. They wish to remove the distance between philosophy and theology by absorbing philosophy within *sacra doctrina*, and nature within grace. The means they employ to this end is the reduction of philosophy and the power of nature on which it depends. Pickstock and Milbank have understood that in Aquinas the human need of the philosophical sciences—which are works of diverse forms of abstraction—prevent rational labour being supplanted in us by infused virtues and angelic intuitions.⁵ For Thomas, although all action in the universe is reduced to God as First Mover,⁶ in that action the works of nature and of grace are mutually interconnected. The imperfect human activities done by the power of nature are presupposed by God’s perfecting operation of grace.⁷ The philosophical sciences belong on the side of human need, natural power, and human work. If philosophy is to be absorbed into sacred doctrine in the way that Milbank and Pickstock wish, philosophy must lose the well-established status it has for Aquinas.

The argument of Milbank and Pickstock is primarily a deduction from a true premise, namely that in Aquinas: “both the natural powers of thought

3. J. Milbank and C. Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, Radical Orthodoxy (London/New York: Routledge, 2001).

4. Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) 233, note 23; the Pabst review is in *Revue thomiste* 101 (2001): 475–79. For a more general assessment, see Adrian Pabst, “De la chrétienté à la modernité? Lecture critique des thèses de *Radical Orthodoxy* sur la rupture scotiste et ockhamienne et sur le renouveau de la théologie de saint Thomas d’Aquin,” *Revue des sciences théologiques et philosophiques* 86 (2002): 561–99. Pabst shows how crucial the reinterpretation of Aquinas is for Radical Orthodoxy (see 586–88, 595–96).

5. Milbank, *Truth* 22–24, 51, 118, note 8, and 126, note 103; *idem*, “The Soul of Reciprocity, Part Two: Reciprocity Granted,” *Modern Theology* 17.4 (October 2001): 485–507 at 487–89.

6. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (Ottawa: Commissio Piana, 1953) [herein after *ST*] 1–2.109.1: *omnes motus tam corporales quam spirituales reducuntur in primum movens simpliciter, quod est Deus* and *Non solum autem a Deo est omnis motio sicut a primo movente, sed etiam ab ipso est omnis formalis perfectio sicut a primo actu.*

7. See Wayne J. Hankey, “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.

and the superadded powers given in grace and glory both operate through participation in the uncreated and intelligible light of the divine intellect.⁸ They use Thomas' text in the second article of Question 12 of the *Summa theologiae* for their purposes. This text is striking and crucial and we shall have cause to return to it again. Question 12 on how we know God develops the doctrine of created grace on which human beatific contemplation depends. The second article gives the basis of that doctrine:

Because this intellectual power of the creature is not the essence of God, it must be some participated likeness of this essence which is the first intellect. Thus, this power of the intellectual creature is called a certain intelligible light, as if derived from the first light, and this is true whether we are speaking about a natural power or about some perfection added by grace or glory. It follows that some likeness to God on the part of the power of sight is required for seeing God, a likeness by which the intellect is capable of seeing God.⁹

This is strong language: our power of understanding is a certain participation in first intellect, i.e. in God's activity of understanding. It is a light derived from the light by which God sees himself and all else. Because of the perfect conformity of knower and known in the divine simplicity, in order for the light of the creature to be turned toward its creator—i.e. for God to be both object and light—the human intellectual power must have sufficient likeness to God's intellect that it is “effective for seeing God.”¹⁰ In Thomas' way of thinking, any gracious addition to the human power for this purpose will presuppose some natural capacity and likeness.¹¹ My question in this communication is as to how this participated likeness to divine intellect works. Milbank and Pickstock give little help with this. Their deficiency comes from deducing how the likeness works from the true premise and failing to follow what Thomas' texts actually say. Proceeding in this way, the biases in their postmodern theological project cause them to supplant or misrepresent abstraction in Thomas' system. As we shall see, human intuition of God is essentially connected to human activity of intellectual abstraction.

8. Milbank, *Truth* 22, citing “ST I.Q.12a. resp,” in fact, the reference is to *ST* 1.12.2 *corpus*.

9. *ST* 1.12.2 *corpus*: *cum ipsa intellectiva virtus creaturae non sit Dei essentia, relinquitur quod sit aliqua participata similitudo ipsius, qui est primus intellectus. Unde et virtus intellectualis creaturae lumen quoddam intelligibile dicitur, quasi a prima luce derivatum; sive hoc intelligatur de virtute naturali, sive de aliqua perfectione superaddita gratiae vel gloriae. Relinquitur ergo ad videndum Deum aliqua Dei similitudo ex parte visivae potentiae, qua scilicet intellectus sit efficax ad videndum Deum.*

10. *Ibid.* *efficax ad videndum Deum.*

11. For the Neoplatonic source of Thomas' doctrine that grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, see Richard Schenk, “From Providence to Grace: Thomas Aquinas and the Platonisms of the Mid-thirteenth Century,” *Nova et Vetera*, in press, parts III and IV.

Because of his teaching on abstraction, Aquinas's treatment of human knowing cannot be assimilated to Platonic or Augustinian notions of intellectual vision or intuition. We cannot affirm with Milbank "that, for Aquinas, all our thought, in order to be thought, is primarily intuitive, albeit in a very weak degree, and so, *in toto* 'metaphysical' or rather 'theological'."¹² Milbank and Pickstock fundamentally misconceive how Aquinas understands our participation in God's knowing: Participation does not mean that we do what God does in the way that God does it, the difference being only a matter of degree. Rather, two Neoplatonic principles, one Porphyrian in origin, the other Iamblichian—both found by Aquinas in the pre-eminently authoritative Dionysius, as well as in many of his other sources—require that we humans know in our own proper way, i.e., rationally. The first derives from Porphyry's *Sententiae ad intelligibilia ducentes*. *Sententia* 10: "All things are in all things but everything is accommodated to the *ousia* of each knower: in the intellect according to *noerōs*, in the soul rationally (*logismōs*) ..." has become the general principle in Aquinas: "a thing is received according to the mode of the receiver."¹³ Aquinas did not find the principle in Porphyry, but it was in many of his Neoplatonic sources, including the pseudo-Dionysius, Boethius, and the *Liber de causis*.¹⁴ The second is the requirement of Iamblichian henology for complete mediation: the *Lex divinitatis*, as it came to be called among the Latin medievals, which, in the judgement of Aquinas, governs the operations of God, gracious and natural.¹⁵

Putting these two principles together locates the human power and mode of knowing midway in a hierarchy. For Aquinas, the most revealing and determinative account of the universe is as a hierarchy of cognitive powers crowned by God, where we have the animals below us and all the ranks of angels above. So far as our thinking has the simplicity of intellect as opposed to *ratio*, this is not by proper possession but "by a certain participation in the simple cognition which is found in the superior substances."¹⁶ Human

12. Milbank, *Truth* 126, note 103.

13. Porphyry, *Sententiae ad Intelligibilia Ducentes*, ed E. Lamberz (Leipzig: Teubner, 1975) § 10, 4, lines 7–8; Aquinas, *ST* 1.84.1 *corpus*: *receptum est in recipiente per modum recipientis*.

14. See Wayne J. Hankey, "Aquinas and the Platonists," in *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages: A Doxographic Approach*, ed. 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 308–09 and 321–22.

15. See Wayne J. Hankey, "Aquinas, Pseudo-Denys, Proclus and Isaiah VI.6," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 64 (1997): 59–93 at 59–60.

16. Aquinas, *Questiones Disputatae de Veritate*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Commissio Leonina: vol. 22, pars 1,2,3 (Rome: 1972–1975) 15.1, *corpus*, pars 2, p. 479, lines 312–16: *quammis cognitio humanae animae proprie sit per viam rationis, est tamen in ea aliqua participatio illius simplicis cognitionis quae in superioribus substantiis invenitur, ex quo etiam intellectivam vim habere dicuntur*; see Wayne J. Hankey, *God In Himself: Aquinas' Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae*, Oxford

knowing is discursive, and we have “no special power by which simply and absolutely, and without moving from one thing to another, we might obtain knowledge of the truth.”¹⁷ Among intellectual creatures, humans are the lowest, and thus their natural capacity is for receiving the forms of material things.¹⁸ The power of knowledge by abstraction from sensible things is unique to humans. When our weak mind turns to separated substances its “knowledge of them has the confused universality which is characteristic of imperfect knowing.”¹⁹ This hierarchical schema limits the human but, nonetheless, it is given a determined place, character, and power. There is no abolition the human, neither is there an absorption into the angelic or divine substances, nor into the intuitive mode of their knowing. Attention to Thomas’ treatments of the agent intellect, of our power to abstract, and thus of our power to *make* the objects of our intellection and our sciences, shows that these are subversive of Augustine.

Aquinas is explicit that he finds in the *Commentary on the De anima* by Themistius the agent intellect of Aristotle being compared to the working of the inherent activity of light, whereas in contrast (according to Themistius) Plato likened it the sun. Aquinas makes Augustine agree with Plato. As he puts it in the *Quaestiones Disputatae de Malo*, where he is citing this frequently used passage from Themistius for the last time:

Plato, since he held the active intellect to be a separate substance, compares it to the sun, as Themistius says in his *Commentary on the De anima*. And so also Augustine in his *Soliloquies* compares God to the sun. But according to Aristotle the active intellect is compared to light participated in a material substance.²⁰

Theological Monographs/Oxford Scholarly Classics (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987/2001) *Endnote* 3, 165.

17. Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 15.1 *corpus*, pars 2, p.480, lines 356–58: *nec in homine est una specialis potentia per quam simpliciter et absolute sine discursu cognitionem veritatis obtineat*. See *ad 2* and *ad 8* of this article, as well as the whole of 15.2 and 8.2 *ad 3*.

18. Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Anima*, ed. D.-C. Bazán, Commissio Leonina: vol. 24, pars 1 (Rome/ Paris, 1996) 18, p. 157–58, lines 313–16: *Manifestum est autem quod anima humana est infima inter omnes intellectuales substantias; unde eius capacitas naturalis est ad recipiendum formas rerum conformiter rebus materialibus*.

19. *Ibid.* 18, p. 157, lines 306–07: *earum cognitio in quadam uniuersalitate et confusione, quod est cognitionis imperfecte*.

20. *Quaestiones Disputatae de Malo*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Commissio Leonina: vol. 23 (Rome/Paris, 1982) 16.12 *ad 1*, p. 333, lines 150–57: *intellectus autem agens, ut dicit Themistius in Commento III De anima, secundum Platonem quidem comparatur soli, quia ponebat intellectum agentem esse substantiam separatam, unde et Augustinus in libro Soliloquiorum Deum comparat soli; set secundum Aristotilem intellectus agens comparatur lumini in aliquo corpore participato*. For translation and date, see *The De Malo of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. R. Regan, Introduction B. Davies (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001) 13 and 955. See Aquinas, *Quaestio Disputata de Spiritualibus Creaturis*, ed. J. Cos, Commissio Leonina: vol. 24.2 (Rome/Paris, 2000) 10 *corpus*, p. 106, lines 276–84 (Cos gives Thomas’ other references to Themistius here); *ibid.* *ad 8*; *ST* 1.79.4; Aquinas, *De Unitate Intellectus contra*

In his *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, Aquinas explicitly opposes Augustine, who on this point “followed Plato as much as the Catholic faith allowed.”²¹ For Plato and Augustine, “forms of things separated from sensibles and immobile” (as Plato has it)²² or “the reasons of things in the divine mind” (Augustine’s formulation), from which science derives, are known “so far as our mind participates these.”²³ To enable this participation Plato and Augustine posited in humans “a knowing power above sense, namely, mind or intellect illuminated by a certain superior intelligible sun.”²⁴ For Aquinas himself the image of the illuminating power in knowing is not an external sun. Rather intellectual illumination comes from the light of the agent intellect which has become an internal power to make something in our own minds.²⁵

In order to avoid strengthening the natural capacity of human reason by ascribing to it this power of making, Pickstock misrepresents Thomas’ doctrine of abstraction reducing it to Platonic intuition. According to her, the form of a sensible thing “leaves its substance and becomes an abstract species.” Like a Platonic idea with wings, it “travels through the human senses ... into the mind of the observer.” It “enters the passive intellect” and is “articulated or expressed by the active intellect.”²⁶ Laurence Hemming has

Averroistas, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Commissio Leonina: vol. 43.4 (Rome, 1976) p. 307, lines 15–18 and 5, p. 314, lines 354–63. Augustine is not mentioned in the last three.

21. Aquinas, *De Spiritualibus Creaturis* 10 ad 8, p. 113, lines 515–16: *Augustinus autem, Platonem secutus quantum fides catholica patiebatur*. Aquinas gives somewhat different accounts of how his own doctrine of an inherent intellectual light and the opposing doctrine of an external illumination of the ideas relate to the history. In *De Veritate* 10.6, five of the nine objections to his doctrine are drawn from Augustine; at *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, 10 ad 8, Augustine and Plato are placed against Aristotle and Thomas’ own teaching. The account in *ST* 1.79 makes it a dispute between Plato and Aristotle. For exact texts of some of Thomas’ sources, see Cos in *De Spiritualibus Creaturis* 112–13. Knowing as making enters the Latin Christian tradition with Boethius and takes its most radical form in Eriugena, see Wayne J. Hankey, “*Secundum rei vim vel secundum cognoscendum facultatem*. Knower and Known in the *Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius and the *Proslogion* of Anselm,” *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism and Christianity*, ed. John Inglis (Richmond [England]: Curzon Press, 2002) 126–50.

22. *Ibid.* p. 112, lines 509–10: *species rerum separatas a sensibilibus et immobiles*.

23. *Ibid.* p. 113, lines 518 and 526–27: “rationes rerum in mente diuina” and “secundum quod eas mens nostra participat.”

24. *Ibid.* p. 112, lines 511–14: *posuit in homine uirtutem cognoscitiuam supra sensum, scilicet mentem uel intellectum, illustratam a quodam superiori sole intelligibili*.

25. E.g., Aquinas, *ST* 1.79.3; 1.79.4 ad 3; Aquinas, *De Veritate* 10.6; and 10.8 ad in contrarium 10.

26. Catherine Pickstock, “Radical Orthodoxy and the Mediations of Time,” *Radical Orthodoxy?—A Catholic Inquiry*, ed. L.P. Hemming (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000) 72. She repeats this misrepresentation in Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* 14. Milbank seems to have a similar image in mind when he writes “the ‘simple essences’ of finite substances as (literally) conveyed into the human mind by way of the senses” (*ibid.* 22). It is ironic that Pickstock’s representation has something in common with the modification of Aquinas introduced by Suárez intended to prevent the abstracting power from producing any change in what is given,

corrected part of her error by noting that Thomistic abstraction is from matter, not from substance.²⁷ Further, and crucially, for Aquinas the intellect does not passively receive a form which has somehow detached itself from its material existence and flown into it. Pickstock needed only to have read further in the *De Veritate* to have found Thomas' authentic teaching: "the possible intellect according to its natural way of working is not in potential except to those forms which have become intelligible through the agent intellect." The agent intellect makes the forms exist in the possible intellect by abstracting them from "phantasms." The "making" intelligible is essential to our way of being intellectual. We cannot know the divine and separate intellects directly, not because they are not intelligible, but because we cannot intuit intellectual being. We must arrive at knowledge of them, to the limited extent that we can, according to the mode by which humans can know: i.e., by ascending from sensible effects and by the work of abstraction.²⁸

When comparing physical sight to intellectual, Thomas has the corporeal light and the agent intellect correspond. He says that "the intelligible form by which the possible intellect comes actually to know" corresponds to the visible form illumined by physical light so as to be seen by the eye. Neither the object seen, nor the substance understood, cause sight or knowledge immediately.²⁹ Seeing and intellection require light. In the case of intellection we must supply the light by which the image is made knowable. Our thinking requires us to make the sensible thinkable by the work of abstraction which is compared to illuminating. Illumination by the agent intellect creates an intelligible form in our potential intellect. On this account, human knowledge of God and other immaterial substances is "naturaliter" restricted to the power of our minds, knowing "per res sensibiles."³⁰ "The likeness of the first cause is not imprinted in our intellect immediately by the cause but by the effect in which the likeness of the cause shines."³¹

see Franz Brentano, "Nous Poïêtikos: Survey of Earlier Interpretations," *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*, ed. Martha C. Nussbaum and Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) 313–41 at 321.

27. Lawrence Hemming, "Introduction" in *Radical Orthodoxy?* 12, note 24.

28. Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 18.2 *corpus*, pars 2, p. 536, lines 84–88: *Et ideo intellectus possibilis secundum naturalem viam non est in potentia nisi ad illas formas quae per intellectum agentem actu intelligibiles fiunt: hae autem non sunt nisi formae sensibilibus rerum quae a phantasmatibus abstrahuntur, nam substantiae immateriales sunt intelligibiles per se ipsas, non quia nos eas intelligibiles faciamus; et ideo intellectus possibilis noster non potest se extendere ad aliqua intelligibilia nisi per illas formas quas a phantasmatibus abstrahit; et inde est quod nec Deum nec substantias alias immateriales cognoscere possumus naturaliter nisi per res sensibiles.*

29. *Ibid.* 18.1 *ad 1*, pars 2, p. 532, lines 242–44: *lumini corporali respondeat lumen intellectus agentis quasi medium sub quo intellectus videt.*

30. *Ibid.* 18.2 *corpus*, pars 2, p. 536, line 97.

31. *Ibid.* 18.1 *ad 1*, pars 2, p. 532, lines 249–51: *ita enim similitudo causae nostro intellectui imprimitur non immediate ex causa sed ex effectu in quo similitudo causae resplendet.*

As is well known, with Aquinas the work of abstraction by which our world of knowledge is made has been radically humanized. In opposition to almost the whole Peripatetic tradition (but not the Neoplatonic commentators), and most directly to Averroes and his Parisian followers, Aquinas individuates the agent intellect. He maintains that this “intellectual power, which judges concerning the truth not through intelligible things existing externally,” but “through the light of the agent intellect which makes the things which can be understood,” is multiplied according to the number of individual human souls so to belong to each of them.³² The light “of which Aristotle speaks is immediately impressed on us by God, and by this we discern the true from the false and the good from the evil.”³³ The impression or seal of the light of God’s face (“*lumen vultus tui*”) is stamped upon humans conferring this inherent light—according to Thomas’ repeated interpretation of Psalm 4, as given in the Septuagint.³⁴ This stamp is essential to the human soul and, whether spoken of as the agent intellect, intellectual light, the habit or “*intellectus*” of first principles, or “*synderesis*”—all somewhat different ways of looking at it—, it cannot be extinguished in us. Let me quote Aquinas when answering a question about *synderesis*:

it is impossible for *synderesis* to be extinguished, just as it is impossible for a man to be deprived of the light of the agent intellect through which first principles in speculative and practical matters are made known to us, for this light belongs to the nature of the human soul, because, by it, the soul is intellectual³⁵

This light is not “a share of the divine intuition,” in the way that Milbank claims, giving us “an intuition of *esse* along with all the other transcendentals and divine attributes.” Milbank is right to note that “Aquinas does not explicitly speak of ‘participation in divine intuition.’” His assertion that,

32. Aquinas, *De Spiritualibus Creaturis* 10 ad 8, p. 113, lines 538–41: *supra sensum est uirtus intellectiua, que indicat de ueritate, non per aliqua intelligibilia extra existentia, set per lumen intellectus agentis, quod facit intelligibilia.*

33. *Ibid.* 10 corpus, p. 107, lines 325–27: *lumen intellectus agentis, de quo Aristoteles loquitur, est nobis immediate impressum a Deo, et secundum hoc discernimus uerum a falso et bonum a malo.* See Aquinas, *De Veritate* 16.3; Aquinas, *ST* 1.79.5. On the Peripatetics, see Harold J. Blumenthal, *Aristotle and Neoplatonism in late Antiquity. Interpretation of the De Anima* (London: Duckworth, 1996) 17; the Neoplatonic commentators may be responsible for what Aquinas concludes, see “Simplicius,” *On Aristotle On the Soul* 3.1–5, trans. H.J. Blumenthal, *Ancient Commentators on Aristotle* (London: Duckworth, 2000) pp. vii, 8, and p. 220, lines 15–17 and 25–35.

34. See, for example, Aquinas, *De Veritate* 16.3 corpus; Aquinas, *ST* 1.79.4; *idem*, *De Spiritualibus Creaturis* 10 corpus.

35. Aquinas, *De Veritate* 16.3 corpus, pars 2, p. 510, lines 46–51: *impossibile est quod synderesis extinguatur sicut impossibile est quod est hominis priuetur lumine intellectus agentis, per quod principia prima et in speculatiuis et in operatiuis nobis innotescunt; hoc enim lumen est de natura ipsius animae cum per hoc sit intellectualis.* See also *ibid.* 16.1 ad 13; 16.2 ad 3 and ad 4.

nonetheless, his doctrine “must amount to this” misstates the matter.³⁶ There is no “intuition” of separate substance or of first principles in addition to or apart from the activity of the soul in knowing sensibles by abstraction. Instead, this knowledge is implicit in the activity of the light by which abstraction takes place. Indeed, the activity of the light and the activity of the first principles in us are the same. Moreover, separate substances can only be objects of our knowledge on the basis of the knowledge of sensible substances which is proper to humans. This is what emerges from the other work in English published in 2001, which considered Thomas’ teaching on intellectual abstraction. Smit endeavours not an assimilation of Thomas’ self-conscious following of Aristotle to an Augustinian intellectual intuition, but rather a reconciliation of the two.

II. THE LIGHT WHICH BRINGS THE PRINCIPLES INTO LIGHT

Houston Smit’s “Aquinas’s Abstractionism,” published in *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, is an important piece of philosophical analysis. Rejecting what he calls the “form-propagation interpretation” of Thomas’ supposed “conceptual empiricism,” a position he plausibly attributes to Étienne Gilson, Smit shows “that the forms which the agent intellect impresses on the possible [intellect]—intelligible forms—do not inhere in the senses at all, and that the agent intellect must in abstracting intelligible forms produce a content not present in any sensible cognition.”³⁷ After attending to features of Thomas’ teaching about intellectual light to which I have pointed above, Smit concludes that “Thomas is fitting his Aristotelian-inspired empiricism into his larger, in many respects neo-Platonic, metaphysics” and that, on this basis, he is “aiming to reconcile” his empiricism with Augustine’s innatism and doctrine of illumination.³⁸ I am not convinced that Aquinas is self-consciously aiming overall for this reconciliation, because, when the various texts are compared, we discover that Thomas places Augustine’s positions on these questions either with the positions he opposes or equally with those he affirms, according to the diverse purposes of his various treatments. Nonetheless, it is true that a considerable degree of reconciliation with Augustine’s doctrine of illumination occurs when Thomas’ arguments are interpreted in their proper Neoplatonic framework. Smit does not, in fact, supply the frame, but we shall search for it after we have profited from his analysis.

Smit begins with an account of Thomas’ views on the limitations of sensory cognition, “explaining how it is limited to the external accidents of

36. Milbank, *Truth* 117–18, note 8.

37. Smit, “Aquinas’s Abstractionism,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10 (2001): 85–118 at 87 and 86, note 6.

38. *Ibid.* 88.

things,” not reaching to their natures, “because it represents things only in images.”³⁹ There is a correspondence between the “metaphysical layers of a material thing—its sensible secondary accidents, its primary accident of quantity ..., and its substance ‘standing under’ the first two”—on the one hand, and the human cognitive faculties, on the other. Intellect, underlying the external and the internal senses, cannot reach its content by a means of a mere sensible givenness: “In order to generate any actually intelligible species from phantasms, the agent intellect must derive from them a formal likeness of the substance of things, a form which is not itself apprehended by either sense or imagination.”⁴⁰ According to Smit, Aquinas is not denying that the senses do apprehend the natures of things but rather, “he means to deny only that the senses *cognize* the natures.”⁴¹ Having distinguished intellectual and sensible knowledge, and recognizing that intellection adds something, Smit sets out to discover the source of what intellect adds.

For a statement of what the agent intellect must add we may turn to Germaine Crompt’s four-volume study of Thomas’s doctrine of abstraction. In a section entitled “Nécessité d’un agent, intellect en acte: immatériel, séparé du singulier, incorruptible” she sets out the differences between the characteristics of the phantasm and of the concept. Like the Neoplatonic predecessors of Aquinas, Crompt puts these in sharp opposition so as to indicate what Aquinas must find through the agent intellect:

*[L]a nécessité d’une espèce intelligible, similitude immatérielle, universelle, nécessaire s’est ... imposée pour expliquer ces mêmes caractères reconnus dans le concept. D’où vient cette espèce?... Ne l’oublions pas, le phantasme s’avère une similitude du réel, mais matérielle, particulière, contingente. Or, jamais le matériel ne produit l’immatériel pur, jamais le particulier par lui-même n’est source d’universel, jamais le contingent tel quel n’est responsable du nécessaire.*⁴²

In his search for the source of what intellect supplies, Smit considers the “Hierarchy of the Spiritual Light and the Nature of the Intellect.” This hierarchy gives us Thomas’ version of the Neoplatonic ordering of beings as a graduated series of acts of *esse* which are also graduated participated modes of intellectual activity. Thomas distinguishes two created emanations from the Divine Word: “the mode of being that things have in intellects ... ‘*esse intelligible*’ [and] that whereby they subsist in their own natures, ‘*esse*

39. *Ibid.*, there is a convincing gathering of texts by Smit at 94–95, including Aquinas, *De Veritate* 1.12; 10.4 *ad* 1; and 10.6 *ad* 2.

40. *Ibid.* 97.

41. *Ibid.* 95.

42. Germaine Crompt, *L’Abstraction de l’intellect agent* 4 tomes, Thèse de Doctorat en Philosophie présentée à l’Université de Montréal, Institut d’Études Médiévales, 1980, tome 4 “L’Intellect agent et son rôle d’abstraction” 167.

naturale (ST 1a.56.2).” The grades of substance, the modes of intellect, and the characters intellectual objects take are all related:

the brighter a creature’s spiritual light, and thus the more it resembles the uncreated light, the more the way in which things exist in its understanding resembles the way these things pre-exist in the Divine Word. It thereby also determines a created intellect’s place in the hierarchy of created intellects, for this hierarchy is determined by the degree to which the distinctive way in which creatures understand things approaches that of God.⁴³

At the top of the hierarchy, the absolutely simple divine being and understanding, there is a complete unity of form and content. *Summa theologiae* 1.84.5 is at the heart of Smit’s argument. There Thomas wrote: “The intellectual light in us is nothing other than a certain participated likeness of the uncreated light in which the eternal reasons are contained.”⁴⁴ Smit explains how, in contrast to physical light, where light, functioning as a kind of universal, is specifically modified by what receives it: “the uncreated light, as the sole cause of all the perfections of creatures, contains them specifically and distinctly ‘in an eminent degree’.”⁴⁵ Crucially, the uncreated light as universal is not the common as an abstraction from all particularity, but rather contains particular difference. In Thomas’ doctrine of abstraction something of what belongs to God’s knowing comes into the human knowledge of sensible substances. The unity of common and the specific, of form and content, in the uncreated light is retained to some degree in the divided modes of knowing which participate in that light. Each kind of knowing creature is given this light in a different way. God gives different kinds of participation in his “*esse intelligibile*”: “in providing creatures with spiritual light, God supplies all *intelligere* for the order of understanding, just as he provides all natural *esse* for the existence of creatures.”⁴⁶ Because the natures of things are properly known in the uncreated light, “it follows ... that a created intellect cognises a thing’s nature by participating, however faintly and imperfectly, in God’s grasp of the way in which the thing participates in divine being.”⁴⁷ I must stress, in a way that Smit does not do, what is implicit in this phrase in his statement: “God’s grasp of the way in which the thing participates in divine

43. Smit, “Aquinas’s Abstractionism” 98.

44. Aquinas, ST 1.84.5: *Ipsum enim lumen intellectuale quod est in nobis, nihil est aliud quam quaedam participata similitudo luminis increati, in quo continentur rationes aeternae.*

45. Smit, “Aquinas’s Abstractionism” 99 citing Aquinas, ST 1.14.6 with 1.55.2 *ad* 1 and 1.84.2.

46. *Ibid.* 101.

47. *Ibid.* 103; For the character of what Thomas teaches in on this and its relation to his sources, see Rudi A. te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas*, Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters xlvii (Leiden/New York/Köln: Brill, 1995) 108–16 and 257–79.

being.” Because God causes through his essence not only by understanding himself in that essence but also by understanding how all other things participate that essence, the difference between his mode of understanding and theirs is contained in his self-knowledge. Thus, although Smit is correct in saying that for Aquinas created intellects “are finite, dim, and imperfect participating likenesses in God’s uncreated light” and that this likeness enables true knowing, it is equally important to recognise that God knows, wills, and creates the differences between the modes of this light. If we are not to reduce abstraction to intuition, we must recognise and affirm as part of God’s creative purpose the specific differences between human knowing and the knowing of other spiritual beings. Rightly dividing, i.e., correctly differentiating, is essential to Thomas’ scholastic method.

As well as forming intellectual realities in us, the agent intellect—as our participation in the uncreated light, a participation specifically given for the knowledge of and by means of sensible substances—imparts some intellectual content, not alongside our knowledge through sensible things but *in* our knowledge of sensible things as our proper form of *intelligere*. Professor Smit treats this intellectual content in his third section entitled: “Spiritual Light and the Production of Actually Intelligible Species.”⁴⁸

Here, it is necessary to refer to the unity within the first principle between the source of illumination, the object illuminated, and the activity of light—a common Neoplatonic way of understanding the highest principles.⁴⁹ Because it participates in this self-cognition, the activity of the agent intellect is actually intelligible and is able to render sensible forms intelligible. Smit writes: “[T]he agent intellect can make sensible forms actually intelligible only in virtue of its containing virtually, as a participating likeness in the divine light, cognition of the divine being” by means of the soul’s knowledge of the transcendentals.⁵⁰ Thomas’ account of the activity of abstraction is complex and involves a number of stages; our purposes do not require us to describe them all. What interests us is the way in which our intellectual light brings something to what we know, and how, conversely, its actualization when it illumines what is given by sense makes its own content known.

Our cognition of the universal principles of *scientia*, like the principle of non-contradiction, is innate in us. The concepts which compose the principles must also be innate. Professor Smit writes: “these concepts, which Thomas terms the first concepts of the understanding, include that of being, ‘the first concept in our intellect’ (CPA [= *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*] I *lec.*

48. *Ibid.* 104.

49. E.g., Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.3.8, 5.3.12, 5.3.17; 6.7.21, 6.7.36, 6.7.41, 6.9.9.

50. Smit, “Aquinas’s Abstractionism” 105 and 112–13.

5) as well as the concepts of unity and truth.”⁵¹ Smit quotes the following from the *De Veritate*:

The first principles whose cognition is innate [*innatus*] in us are certain likenesses of uncreated truth. When we judge about other things through these likenesses, we are said to judge things through unchangeable principles or through uncreated truth The light of reason through which such [inborn and self-evident first] principles are evident to us is implanted in us by God as a kind of reflected likeness in us of the uncreated truth.⁵²

The transcendentals reflect God’s nature, and the light by which we bring these to *scientia* makes them immediately evident because it shares something of the character of his self-knowledge. The *De Veritate* likens these universal principles to seeds. Smit comments: “As his characterizing the first concepts of the understanding as ‘seeds of *scientia*’ suggests, Aquinas holds that *scientia* proper grows out of our application of these concepts in demonstrative reasoning.”⁵³ Returning to the *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*, we find the conclusion of a demonstration compared to the effect of a cause. The conclusions exist virtually in the principles just as effects exist virtually in their causes. “Our intellect immediately cognises the first concepts ‘by the light of the agent intellect’ and ‘through the species abstracted from the sensible things.’ ... [T]he first concepts of the understanding pre-exist virtually in the power of the agent intellect.”⁵⁴ Our intellect is able to make itself actually

51. *Ibid.* 107; see Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio Libri Posteriorum*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Editio altera retractata, Commissio Leonina: vol. 1, pars 2 (Rome/Paris, 1989) 1.5, p. 25, lines 116–23: *Ad huius autem diuisionis intellectum, sciendum est quod quelibet propositio cuius predicatum est in ratione subiecti est immediata et per se nota, quantum est in se. Sed quarundam propositionum termini sunt tales quod sunt in noticia omnium, sicut ens et unum et alia que sunt entis in quantum ens: nam ens est prima conceptio intellectus.*

52. *Ibid.* 108, quoting *De Veritate* 10.6 ad 6, pars 2, p. 313, lines 265–70: *Ad sextum dicendum quod prima principia quorum cognitio est nobis innata sunt quaedam similitudo increatae veritatis; unde secundum quod per ea de aliis indicamus, dicimus indicare de rebus per rationes incommutabiles vel per veritatem increatam.* And *ibid.* 11.1 *corpus*, p. 351, line 353–p. 352, line 360: *Huiusmodi autem rationis lumen quo principia huiusmodi nobis sunt nota, est nobis a Deo inditum quasi quaedam similitudo increatae veritatis in nobis resultans. Unde cum omnis doctrina humana efficaciam habere non possit nisi ex virtute illius luminis, constat quod solus Deus est qui interius et principaliter docet*

53. *Ibid.* 109.

54. *Ibid.* quoting Aquinas, *Expositio Libri Posteriorum*, 1.3, p. 14, line 22–p. 15, line 35: *oportet principia conclusioni precognoscere; principia autem se habent ad conclusiones in demonstratiuis sicut cause actiue in naturalibus ad suos effectus (unde in II Phisicorum propositiones syllogismi ponuntur in genere cause efficientis); effectus autem, ante quam producatur in actum, preexistit quidem in causis actiuis uirtutem, non autem actu, quod est simpliciter esse; et similiter, ante quam ex principis demonstrationis deducatur conclusio, in ipsis quidem principis precognitis precognoscitur conclusio uirtute quidem, non autem actu: sic enim in eis preexistit. Et sic patet quod non precognoscitur simpliciter, sed secundum quid.* Thomas goes on to argue against what he represents as Plato’s doctrine in the *Meno*: *Secundum uero Platonis sententiam, conclusio erat precognita*

knowing because, in respect to its possession of these first principles, it is complete by nature. Thomas writes in the *De Veritate*, our intellect:

could not reduce itself from potency to act had not its cognition with respect to some things been complete through nature. Consequently, there are some things in our intellects which we cognise naturally, namely, the first principles, even though in us this cognition is not made real unless we receive something through our senses.⁵⁵

Two issues here will persist in the history we shall trace: first what is the precise character of the actuality of intellectual life in us? The second issue is connected to this: what is the relation of the two causes of our knowing, namely, intellect and sense? Aquinas tells us that the primary and most universal concepts (and these alone) pre-exist in us as what he calls, an “active and completed potency.”⁵⁶ Smit judges that they are not caused in us by the sensible species, “rather ... the intellect brings these concepts, and thereby its own natural power, into perfect act only in abstracting intelligible species from phantasms, an act which realizes these concepts in these species.”⁵⁷ Thus, for Thomas, in contrast to the agent intellect, which is the primary cause of our knowledge, “the phantasms act as instrumental and secondary agents.”⁵⁸ In the *Summa theologiae*, the secondary role of the sensible is further refined by Aquinas so as to prevent its direct action on the possible intellect: sensible knowledge is “the material of the cause” of intellectual knowledge in us.⁵⁹

Smit moves on to consider how the agent intellect produces intelligible forms “by supplementing our sensible apprehension of the proper accidents of a thing with our innate cognitions of being and unity.”⁶⁰ In the *De Veritate* we find that “the intelligible species has that which is formal in it from the agent intellect, through which it is actually intelligible, which is a higher power than the possible intellect, although that which is material in it

simpliciter, unde non addiscebatur de nouo, set potius per deductionem aliquam rationis in memoriam reducebatur (p. 15, lines 61–64). The doctrine may be compared to that in Aquinas, *ST* 1.84.3.

55. Aquinas, *De Veritate* 8.15 *corpus*, pars 2, p. 269, lines 122–29: *nec posset se de potentia in actum reducere nisi quantum ad aliqua esset eius completa cognitio per naturam; unde oportet quod in intellectu nostro sint quaedam quae intellectus naturaliter cognoscit, scilicet prima principia, quamvis etiam ista cognitio in nobis non determinetur nisi per acceptionem a sensibus.*

56. *Ibid.* 11.1 *corpus*, pars 2, p. 351, line 281: *potentia activa completa.*

57. Smit, “Aquinas’s Abstractionism” 111.

58. Aquinas, *De Veritate* 10.6 *ad* 7, pars 2, p. 314, lines 277–82: *in receptione qua intellectus possibilis species rerum accipit a phantasmatis, se habent phantasmata ut agens instrumentale vel secundarium, intellectus vero agens ut agens principale et primum.*

59. Aquinas, *ST* 1.84.6, *corpus*: *non potest dici quod sensibilis cognitio sit totalis et perfecta causa intellectualis cognitionis, sed magis quodammodo est materia causae.*

60. Smit, “Aquinas’s Abstractionism” 112.

is abstracted from phantasms.”⁶¹ Smit comments: “in producing from itself the universal conceptions that are ‘certain likenesses of uncreated truths’ ... the agent intellect gives intelligible species their form of intelligibility.”⁶² Smit concludes:

... the intelligible forms that come to inform our intellects ... are ... forms produced through our share in the divine spiritual light. This connatural light of our souls produces these forms ... only because all *scientia* pre-exists in it [i.e., the soul] virtually and universally, in partial active potency [The intellect] requires phantasms not because they already contain what we represent abstractly in concepts, but because, in supplying images of material things, phantasms provide enough information to render distinct the content which pre-exists in its light in a “general and confused way.” In this way, Aquinas maintains that we derive our intelligible species from our sense cognition without holding that these species “come in” from outside us in this cognition.⁶³

Universals are needed from above (so to speak), because otherwise we would only have abstract universals, universals from which all that is particular has been eliminated. In order for the highest universals to match what is given from below (from sense), we must have a connection to the divine fullness. As we shall see when we reach the conclusion of our history, the same concern moved the Greek Neoplatonists. For Aquinas, when abstracting the forms of sensible things, we make the greatest and most common universals emerge in our minds. In consequence the exercise of our characteristic intellectual activity strengthens in us the power by which we can approximate the knowledge of separate and divine intellects. Because the light by which these makings come to be is not only derived from the divine uncreated light, but is also the agent power of each of our own minds, what we know in it and by it is ourselves. We both come to know our likeness to God and, at the same time, become more God-like. Thomas’ unification of the *Gnothi seauton* and the knowledge of God by bringing into explicit knowledge what is implicit in the soul’s rational power, even when it is turned to the sensible, and by mounting from this toward the intelligible, and to participation in pure intellect, places him in the Neoplatonic tradition wherein Aristotelian science and Platonic reminiscence are unified.⁶⁴ We shall make a step-by-step journey back to the origins of this tradition in order to locate some of

61. Aquinas, *De Veritate* 18.8 ad 3, pars 2, p. 559, lines 118–20: *species intelligibilis id quod in ea formale est, per quod est intelligibilis actu, habet ab intellectu agente qui est potentia superior intellectu possibili quamvis id quod in ea materiale est a phantasmatibus abstrahatur.*

62. Smit, “Aquinas’s Abstractionism” 113.

63. *Ibid.* 118.

64. See “‘Knowing As We are Known’ in *Confessions* 10 and Other Philosophical, Augustinian and Christian Obedience to the Delphic *Gnothi Seauton* from Socrates to Modernity,” *Augustinian Studies* 34:1 (2003): 23–48.

the sources of his doctrine, and so as to indicate the framework within the structure of Thomas' reasoning appears.

III. LATIN AND ARABIC SOURCES

It is clear that for Aquinas *synderesis*, contemplation, and the work of the agent intellect in abstraction are connected. Moreover, the structure of the connection is a Neoplatonic unification of Aristotelian and the Platonic traditions. In consequence, it will be useful to examine an astonishing insertion of a doctrine taken from Eriugena within Thomas' most complete treatment of abstraction, his early commentary in six questions on the *De Trinitate* of Boethius. The passage occurs in the third response within the first article of the sixth question asking whether we ought to proceed according to the *modus intellectus* in divine science. Thomas affirms that we must proceed intellectually in theology "insofar as intellectual consideration is the *terminus* of the rational,"⁶⁵ because all the other sciences are "resolved into divine science." I quote the passage:

For all consideration by way of rational resolution in all sciences comes to its conclusion in divine science. For reason, as has been said above, sometimes proceeds from one real thing to another existing being, as for example when a demonstration is made through external causes or effects: by synthesis (*componendo*) when we proceed from causes to effects, by resolution (*resolviendo*) when we proceed from effects to causes, because causes are more simple, unchangeable, and uniformly constant than their effects. Consequently the ultimate conclusion of analysis (*resolutionis*) according to this mode of reasoning is when we arrive at the supreme and most simple causes, which are the separate substances.⁶⁶

Essential for connecting this discussion of the movement up the ladder of the sciences with Smit's discussion, which moves downward so far as it centers on how demonstration and abstraction depend upon the knowledge of the transcendentals innate in the agent intellect, is the following continuation of the passage. It has to do with movement "according to reason" (*secundum rationem*) as opposed to movement "according to reality" (*secundum rem*):

65. Aquinas, *Super Boetium de Trinitate*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Commissio Leonina: vol. 50 (Rome/Paris, 1992) 6.1. *corpus* 3, p. 163, lines 392–94: *in quantum consideratio intellectualis est terminus rationalis*.

66. *Ibid.* p. 162, lines 360–72: *Tota autem consideratio rationis resolventis in omnibus scientiis ad considerationem diuine scientie terminatur. Ratio enim, ut prius dictum est, procedit quandoque de uno in aliud secundum rem, ut quando est demonstratio per causas uel effectus extrinsecos; componendo quidem cum proceditur a causis ad effectus, quasi resolviendo cum proceditur ab effectibus ad causas, eo quod cause sunt effectibus simpliciores et magis immobiliter et uniformiter permanentes; ultimus ergo terminus resolutionis in hac via est cum peruenitur ad causas supremas maxime simplices, que sunt substantie separate.*

At other times, however, reason proceeds from one item to another within the mental order, as for example when it progresses according to the order of intrinsic causes: by synthesis (*componendo*) when we advance from the most universal forms to the more particular, by resolution (*resolviendo*) when we move in the converse order because the more universal is the most simple. Then, because the supreme universals are what are common to all beings, therefore the conclusion of the resolution (*terminus resolutionis*) according to this mode of reasoning is the consideration of being and the properties of being as being.⁶⁷

Evidently the consideration of these supreme universals, of the properties of being as such, and of the first science, which is divine and metaphysical, is “supremely intellectual” (*maxime intellectualis*). In this way Aquinas both answers the question he posed and, by resolution (*resolviendo*) draws all science to theology as its principle.

In her study of Thomas’ notions of *resolutio*, Eileen Sweeney calls this notion “*Resolutio* as Reversion,” and sees it as “Neoplatonic,” both in contrast to “*Resolutio* as Division,” for which Thomas’ sources are Aristotle and Calcidius, and also in contrast to geometrical resolution.⁶⁸ She plausibly proposes that Thomas’ source here is Jean Scottus Eriugena, who certainly uses *resolutio* in this way and whom Aquinas might have found as the “*Commentator*” on the text of Dionysius in the Parisian *corpus dionysicum*.⁶⁹ In fact, in the immediately preceding passage Aquinas has been discussing the views of Dionysius and he reproduces this treatment of *resolutio* in his *Commentary on the Divine Names*.⁷⁰ The doctrine reappears in the *Summa theologiae* where

67. *Ibid.* p. 162, lines 372–82: “*Quandoque uero procedit de uno in aliud secundum rationem, ut quando est processus secundum causas intrinsecas; componendo quidem quando a formis maxime universalibus in magis particulata proceditur, resolviendo autem quando e conuerso, eo quod uniuersalius est simplicius; maxime autem uniuersalia sunt que sunt communia omnibus entibus, et ideo terminus resolutionis in hac uia ultimus est consideratio entis et eorum que sunt entis in quantum huiusmodi.*”

68. Eileen C. Sweeney, “Three Notions of *resolutio* and the Structure of Reasoning in Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 58:2 (1994): 197–241 at 215 and 228.

69. See text of Eriugena, *Periphyseon* II, 526a–b and note at Sweeney, “Three Notions” 216; on the source of the Dionysian and Eriugenian doctrine in Proclus, see *ibid.* 216–24 and Jean Scot Érigène, *De la Division de la Nature, Periphyseon, Livre I et II*, intro., trad. et notes par Francis Bertin (Paris: PUF, 1995) 423–24, note 4; on Eriugena’s transmission by the *corpus dionysicum*, see Christophe Erismann, “Jean Scot Érigène” in *Dictionnaire du Moyen Âge*, sous la direction de Claude Gauvard, Alain de Libera, Michel Zink (Paris: Quadrige/PUF, 2002) 771–75 at 774, and *A Thirteenth-Century Textbook of Mystical Theology at the University of Paris: The Mystical Theology of Dionysius the Areopagite in Eriugena’s Translation with the Scholia translated by Anastasius the Librarian and Excerpts from Eriugena’s Periphyseon*, ed., trans., and intro. by L. Michael Harrington, Dallas Medieval Texts and Translations 4 (Paris/Leuven/Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2004); on his use of *resolutio*, see Jean Trouillard, “La Notion d’analyse chez Érigène,” in *Jean Scot Érigène et l’histoire de la philosophie*, éd. R. Roques, Colloques internationales du CNRS (Paris: CNRS, 1977) 349–56.

70. Aquinas, *In librum Beati Dionysii De diuinis nominibus expositio*, ed. C. Pera (Turin/Rome: Marietti, 1950) 1.1.2, §51, p. 17–18.

he makes clear in two separate passages that the understanding of principles is the beginning and end of reasoning:

Since movement always proceeds from something immovable, and ends in something at rest, hence it is that human reasoning, according to the path of inquiry or discovery, proceeds from certain things simply understood, which are the first principles; and again, according to the path of judgment, returns by analysis to first principles, in which it examines what it has discovered.⁷¹

For our purposes three points are of particular interest: first, the circularity of the movement described, second, the unification of the various objective and subjective aspects, and third, the source of the doctrine. As to the first: in the *De Veritate*, as well as in the *Super Boetium*, Thomas makes the circularity involved in *resolutio* explicit.⁷² He raises the question as to whether the circularity in the relations of the sciences is vicious, and concludes it is not because some of the principles employed in them are not taken from other sciences but are *per se nota*.⁷³ Resolution must come to an end with “principles of demonstration which cannot be demonstrated,” these are “naturally known being manifest to humans by the light of the agent intellect, something natural to them.”⁷⁴ As to the unification of aspects: Louis Geiger in his famous article on abstraction and separation in the *Super de Trinitate* referred already to the aspect “purement objective” and “l’aspect subjectif.”⁷⁵ By taking us back to Eriugena, Eileen Sweeney goes far further. She shows that the circle which moves down by synthesis (*componendo*) and back by analysis (*resolutio*) is that described: (1) by the divine intellect, (2) by the order of the emanation of beings, (3) by the logical order, as well as (4) by the sciences, and (5) by the human mind. This unification of all the considerations comes out, as Sweeney demonstrates, only in the Neoplatonic emanationist version of Thomistic *resolutio*. As a result, this kind of analysis

71. Aquinas, *ST* 1.79.8: *Et quia motus est semper ab immobili procedit, et ad aliquid quietum terminatur, inde est quod ratiocinatio humana, secundum viam inquisitionis vel inventionis, procedit a quibusdam simpliciter intellectis, quae sunt prima principia; et rursus in via iudicii, resolvendo redit ad prima principia, ad quae inventa examinat.* See Aquinas, *ST* 1.14.7.

72. Aquinas, *De Veritate* 10.8 ad 10, pars 2, p. 323, line 386.

73. At *Super Boetium de Trinitate*, 5.1 ad 9, Thomas denies that there is a “*circulus in deffinitione*” (p. 141, lines 370–71) and p. 141, lines 367 and 369–70.

74. *Super Boetium* 6.4 corpus, p. 170, lines 112–13: “*principia demonstrationum indemonstrabilia*” and 123–25: “*naturaliter cognita homini manifestantur ex ipso lumine intellectus agentis, quod est homini naturale.*”

75. L-B. Geiger, “Abstraction et séparation d’après saint Thomas *In de Trinitate*, Q. 5, A. 3” as reprinted with up-dated references in *Penser avec Thomas d’Aquin: Etudes thomistes de Louis-Bretrand Geiger* OP, présentées par Ruedi Imbach, Pensée antique et médiévale (Paris/Fribourg: Cerf/Éditions Universitaires de Fribourg, 2000) 139–83 at 144 and xxi–xxiii.

comprehends and surpasses the other uses of *resolutio* by Aquinas.⁷⁶ The beginning and the end of this circle as it is traversed by the human mind are not apprehended in the same way, although they are in reality the same. This is true for other circumnavigations, perhaps even for God's.⁷⁷ In the *reditus* or "perfection seconde"—to use the term of Édouard Weber—what was implicit in the universals has been explicated.⁷⁸ Finally, knowing Thomas' sources here is important. Eileen Sweeney has taken us some way, having reached back to Eriugena and Proclus, we turn now to studies by Alain de Libera, on the one hand, and Claude Lafleur, on the other, to carry us further. They are concerned with the origins of the doctrine that three kinds of abstraction—the third of which is called separation—constitute the sciences: natural, mathematical, and theological.

Claude Lafleur begins his study of abstraction and separation in the *Super de Trinitate* by reference to the work of de Libera and presents his study as confirming de Libera's conclusions about the Arabic Peripatetic origins of the doctrine. By examining what was taught in the Faculty of Arts at Paris, Lafleur shows that all the essentials of Thomas' doctrine were general there, and that the doctrine, derived from Al-Farabi and common in the Faculty, is taken over by Aquinas.⁷⁹ Examining a work from the years between 1231 and 1235 attributed to one Jean le Page, a Master of Arts at Paris, Lafleur finds "pratiquement tous les traits de la libre reprise artienne d'un farabisme, teinté d'avicennisme, énumérés par l'auteur de *La querelle des universaux*." I shall not reproduce the whole list, but its first and last items directly concern us: "1. l'idéal de la 'réalisation de l'univers métaphysique en l'âme' par la philosophie, la science étant considérée comme l'indispensable intermédiaire entre le connaissant et le connaissable."⁸⁰ Science belongs to the soul, its structure, and

76. Sweeney, "Three Notions" 216–18 and 241.

77. My *God in Himself* as a whole is an exhibition of these circles in the *Summa theologiae* and the difference between their endings and their beginnings. For a consideration of the problems with this structure essential to Neoplatonism, see John Dillon, "Damascius on Procession and Return," *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism*, ed. J.J. O'Cleary, Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, De Wulf–Mansion Centre, I.XXIV (Leuven/Paris: Leuven UP and Les Belles Lettres, 1997) 369–79.

78. For the "perfection seconde" in relation to the "perfection première" and a list of passages from Aquinas, see Wéber, *Dialogue et dissensions* 463–65.

79. See C. Lafleur, "Abstraction, séparation et tripartition de la philosophie théorétique: Quelques éléments de l'arrière-fond farabien et artien de Thomas d'Aquin, *Super Boetium* <<De Trinitate>>," question 5, article 3," *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales* 67:2 (2000): 248–71; idem, "Abstraction, séparation et objet de la métaphysique," *Actes du XXVIIe Congrès de l'Association des Sociétés de Philosophie de Langue Française. La métaphysique: son histoire, sa critique, ses enjeux*, ed. L. Langlois and J.-M. Narbonne, Collection Zétésis (Paris/Québec: Vrin/Presses de l'Université Laval 2000) 216–23.

80. Lafleur, "Abstraction, séparation et tripartition" 262.

its self-knowledge. There is in this construction of the sciences the same unification, at least in principle, of the subjective and of various objective elements which Sweeney discovered in Thomas' Neoplatonic employment of *resolutio*. The last item in Lafleur's list is: "5. la référence aux et la citation des *Secunds analytiques* II, 19 pour expliquer l'induction abstractive de l'universel intelligé au terme de la séquence: sens, mémoire et expérience."⁸¹ This fifth item is a kind of shorthand by which Lafleur indicates the anti-empiricist interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine of abstraction which de Libera traces back to Syrianus, an interpretation which makes room for intuition and illumination. This is where Smit's Thomistic reconciliation of Aristotle and Augustine enters, the place where Aristotelian abstraction and Platonic reminiscence come together. As de Libera puts it:

*Ignoré comme tel, le modèle concordataire de Syrianus ne cessera pas pour autant de se re-présenter sous des formes variées, dans toutes les doctrines latines tentant d'articuler l'abstraction aristotélicienne avec la théorie augustinienne des Idées divines et de la vision en Dieu.*⁸²

We know that Aquinas began his studies of Aristotle at Naples within the context of the *péripatétisme arabe*. As a result of its Arabic transformations, which were preceded by Byzantine developments requiring that Neoplatonism be hidden within commentary on Aristotle, the thought of the Stagarite appears in the Latin West as: "un corpus philosophique total, où toute la pensée hellénistique, profondément néoplatonicienne, s'était glissée—parfois subrepticement."⁸³ Thus, Albertus Magnus assimilates Platonism into a moment within Peripatetic thought. Aquinas, without knowing Plato, gives a great deal more to Platonism; nonetheless, Thomas' Aristotle is profoundly Neoplatonised.⁸⁴ When considering what, in the wake

81. *Ibid.*

82. A. de Libera, *La querelle des universaux: De Platon à la fin du Moyen Âge*, Des travaux (Paris: Seuil, 1996) 123.

83. Alain de Libera, *Penser au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Seuil, 1991) 20. See also Ewert H. Cousins, "The Indirect Influence of the Koran on the Notion of Reason in the Christian Thought of the Thirteenth Century," *Actas del V Congreso Internacional de Filosofía Medieval*, 2 vols (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1979) i, 651–56 and G. 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*, éd. A.Ph. Segonds et C. Steel, *Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, De Wulf-Mansion Centre, Series 1, XXVI (Leuven/Paris: Leuven UP/Les Belles Lettres, 2000) 553–570.

84. A. de Libera, "Albert le Grand et Thomas d'Aquin interprètes du *Liber de Causis*," *Revue des sciences théologiques et philosophiques* 74 (1990): 347–78; idem, "Albert le Grand et le platonisme. de la doctrine de idées à la théorie des trois états de l'universel," *On Proclus and his Influence in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. E.P. Bos and P.A. Meijer, *Philosophia Antiqua* 53 (Leiden: Brill, 1992) 89–119; Thérèse Bonin, *Creation As Emanation. The Origin of Diversity in Albert the Great's On The Causes And The Procession Of The Universe*, Publications in Medieval Studies, The

of the developments in late Antiquity, Al-Farabi—to whom Paris owed its schematization of the sciences as forms of abstraction or separation—adds to Peripatetic metaphysics by placing it within an emanationist schema, de Libera comments that:

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.⁸⁵

All the elements of Thomas' thought we have identified so far emerge in the transition from Greek Neoplatonists to the Arabic Peripatetics. The history is too complex to summarize adequately here, we shall, however, first note its result and then indicate some crucial stages.

Ultimately we witness during this transition an exchange, occurring over hundreds of years, between Aristotelianisms, Platonisms, and religious forms so that a spiritual ladder is constructed. On this ladder the soul ascends through the work of abstraction to the contemplation of separate substances as her bliss and she simultaneously intuits what is implicit in her own intellectual light. These transitions and exchanges as they are explained by de Libera in *La querelle des universaux* encompass the movement:

où Syrianus prétend concilier l'abstraction aristotélicienne et la réminiscence platonicienne, l'universel comme concept logique et l'universel comme Forme séparée, à la reprise péripatéticienne arabe où, par l'adoption d'une métaphysique émanatiste, est décisivement frappé le problème qui, à partir du XIII^e siècle, sera au coeur de toute la querelle des universaux: la distinction entre connaissance empirique et connaissance a priori.⁸⁶

As we have seen from Smit, Thomas overcomes the destructive opposition between these two forms of knowledge by the work of the agent intellect which, in bringing sensibles to knowledge, also brings to light the knowledge of God innate in the human soul, and prepares her for contemplation of separate substance.

As de Libera tells it, the first step in the movement has to do with something original in Syrianus, namely:

introduire un intermédiaire entre ces deux extrêmes, entre «l'acte de synthèse rationnelle» ... et la réminiscence, le concept abstrait d'Aristote, produit de la pensée humaine, et l'Idée transcendante de Platon. Cet intermédiaire est une «Forme psychique» qui tient des deux réalités qu'elle réunit: elle a le même

Medieval Institute, University of Notre Dame XXIX (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2001) and W.J. Hankey, "Thomas' Neoplatonic Histories: His following of Simplicius," *Dionysius* 20 (2002): 153–78.

85. De Libera, *La querelle* 117.

86. *Ibid.* 69–70.

logos, le même contenu définitionnel que le concept abstrait, mais, en même temps, elle est aussi l'image, immanente à l'âme «de la Forme intelligible» transcendante «qui est dans l'Intellect divin.»⁸⁷

We can see here the foundations of Thomas' way of understanding the agent intellect. The next step toward his doctrine involves the Arabs. They replace reminiscence with the illumination of the human soul by a separate agent intellect established in an "émanatiste" cosmology. The end of metaphysics is remade into "l'intuition intellectuelle' qui réalise dans l'âme humaine la connaissance des 'êtres séparés'."⁸⁸ The last step before arriving at Aquinas and his teachers at the University of Naples comes with Averroes.

De Libera refers us to "The Commentator" on *De Anima* III, Commentary 36:

[Averroès] décrit le rôle de l'intellect agent dans ... l'habilitation de l'intellect possible au raisonnement démonstratif ... habilitation qui suppose que l'intellect possible soit doté de principes de connaissance susceptibles d'être formulés et de servir le point de départ reconnu à l'enchaînement propositionnel aboutissant aux conclusions qui constituent la science. Dans la perspective d'Averroès, les «premiers principes» sont les «instruments» dont se sert l'intellect agent pour faire passer l'intellect possible à l'état de puissance de connaître discursivement. Cet état est décrit comme habitus primorum principiorum «possession des principes premiers du savoir.»⁸⁹

Aquinas follows Averroes on this in several places, one of which is the *Disputed Questions On the Soul*:

There are some who hold that the agent intellect is nothing more than our habit of indemonstrable principles. But this cannot be true because we know even these indemonstrable principles by abstracting from singulars, as the Philosopher teaches near the end of the *Posterior Analytics*. Hence it is necessary that the agent intellect exist prior to the habit of principles as its cause. For these principles may be compared to the agent intellect as certain instruments of it, because by means of these principles the agent intellect makes other things to be actually intelligible.⁹⁰

87. *Ibid.* 107. A good deal of the same history is told in the remarkable Edward Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology in Islamic and Christian Thinkers*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983). Booth places with Proclus what de Libera locates in Syrianus

88. *Ibid.* 111.

89. *Ibid.* 121.

90. Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Anima* ed. D.-C. Bazán, Commissio Leonina: vol. 24, pars 1 (Rome/Paris: 1996) 5, p. 43, lines 250–60: *Quidam uero crediderunt intellectum agentem non esse aliud quam habitum principiorum indemonstrabilium in nobis. Sed hoc esse non potest, quia etiam ipsa principia indemonstrabilia cognoscimus abstrahendo a singularibus, ut docet Philosophus in fine Posteriorum. Unde oportet preexistere intellectum agentem habitui principiorum, sicut causam ipsius. Ipsa uero principia comparantur ad intellectum agentem ut instrumenta quaedam eius, quia per ea facit alia intelligibilia esse actu.* See also Aquinas, *In de Anima* 3.4 (430a10–18), *Summa Contra Gentiles* 2.78.

After reading this, one is astonished, because of his polemic against Averroes on other points, by the degree to which Thomas' assertion that the light "of which Aristotle speaks is immediately impressed on us by God"⁹¹ should be altered to "the light of which Averroes speaks is immediately impressed on us by God." Certainly we have abundant evidence of Thomas's opposition to Averroes and to his Latin followers in the Faculty of Arts at Paris as well as of his laborious attempts to recover the Greek as opposed to the Arabic Aristotle in order to gain authority for his doctrine that the agent intellect is individuated in every human soul.⁹² Nonetheless, it is clear that Thomas largely understands Aristotle's teaching on the agent intellect not against but through Averroes as the transmitter of the synthesis of Neoplatonic and Peripatetic philosophy made in late Antiquity and consolidated by the Arabs. Aquinas has harvested the fruit of the development from Syrianus to Averroes traced by de Libera and made it immanent in the human soul.

IV. THE NEOPLATONIC SPRINGS

Within de Libera's treatment of the transition "Du néoplatonisme grec au péripatétisme arabe," we find one of his boxed notes "Sur le concept néoplatonicien de projection." Here he treats a notion developed in Proclus to which both Iamblichus and Syrianus made crucial contributions.⁹³ Searching for the springs from which Thomas' conception of our intellectual light rose, we must now consider what is involved in this idea. I turn to an article by Carlos Steel: "Breathing Thought: Proclus on the Innate Knowledge of the Soul." A sketch of its argument will indicate that the major elements of Thomas' construction of the empirical and the innate in our knowing are already at play in Proclus. I shall follow this summary with some bibliographical notes about where we may find the Proclean doctrine developed, and about the route by which we may trace its much-transformed reception by Aquinas.

Proclus teaches in the *Elements of Theology*: "Every soul possesses all the forms which the intellect possesses primitively."⁹⁴ Although Aquinas does not cite this Proposition in his *Super Librum de Causis*, he does quote the next which he recognises as the source of Proposition 14 of the *Liber de causis*: "Sensible things are in every soul because it is their example, and intelligible

91. Aquinas, *De Spiritualibus Creaturis* 10 corpus, p. 107, lines 325–26.

92. See Aquinas, *L'Unité de l'intellect contre les Averroïstes suivi des Textes contre Averroës antérieurs à 1270*, texte latin, traduction, introduction, biographie, chronologie, notes et index par A. de Libera, 2^e éd. (Paris: GF-Flammarion, 1997).

93. Libera, *La querelle des universaux*: 109.

94. Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, ed. E.R. Dodds, 2^e ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) Prop. 194, p. 169.

things are in it because it knows them.”⁹⁵ After citing the authority of Dionysius to confirm that effects image their causes, he comments: “it is evident that sensible things pre-exist in the soul as in a cause, which is in a certain sense the exemplar of its effects.”⁹⁶

What Steel takes from the *Elements* of Proclus, his commentaries on the *Alcibiades*, on the *Parmenides*, and on Euclid arrives at results, which, despite real differences, are remarkably like those of Aquinas, and are often reached by similar reasonings. In considering how, for Proclus, these innate reasons of which Aquinas wrote might be in the soul, Steel brings us to an argument like that which caused Aquinas to refuse identifying the agent intellect as the *habitus primorum principiorum*:

[I]t is not possible to possess *logoi* as a sort of lifeless and thoughtless material which awaits an explicit cognitive act to become intelligible. By definition, *logoi* cannot be what they are (i.e. “reasons”), without involving some kind of cognitive (“rational”) activity Indeed, all forms without matter, ... are necessarily totally intelligible and therefore must always be the objects of an intelligizing activity.⁹⁷

For Proclus, human souls have become detached from the intellect where they originate:

Here we have a separation between what the soul is *in its essence* and what it realizes *in its activity* When actually thinking, the soul “projects” before itself the ideal reasons, which actually belong to its essence, but are considered now in an explicit articulated act as objects distinct from its being [I]n our particular souls, because of the shock of birth, the access to the innate reasons has been temporarily blocked: they have fallen into ignorance and potentiality and must be stimulated from outside, awakened by sense-perception, before they can again “project” their innate reasons.⁹⁸

In his commentary on the *Alcibiades* the relation between the hidden intellectual activity and the soul’s reasoning is expressed by a metaphor taken from life: “We possess in our essential being the innate reasons of things

95. Aquinas, *Super Librum De Causis Expositio*, ed. H.-D. Saffrey, *Textus Philosophici Friburgenses* 4/5 (Fribourg: Société Philosophique/Louvain: Éditions E. Nauwelaerts, 1954) Prop. 14a, p. 84: *In omni anima res sensibiles sunt per hoc quod est exemplum eis, et res intelligibiles in ea sunt quia scit eas.*

96. *Super Librum De Causis*, Comment on Prop. 14a, p. 86, lines 5–7: *sic igitur patet quod sensibilia praeexistunt in anima sicut in causa quae quodammodo est exemplar effectuum.*

97. Carlos Steel, “Breathing Thought: Proclus on the Innate Knowledge of the Soul,” *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism*, ed. J.J. O’Cleary, Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, De Wulf-Mansion Centre, I.XXIV (Leuven/Paris: Leuven UP/Les Belles Lettres, 1997) 293–309 at 296.

98 *Ibid.* 296–97.

as it were breathing out their knowledge.”⁹⁹ According to Steel, in another place in the same text Proclus adds the metaphor of light:

Even when it is surrounded with a thick smoggy darkness that makes it impossible to shine forth and illuminate its surroundings, it remains shining inside and is not entirely obscured. We do not have to kindle it again for it to shed illumination, but only take away its hindrances. Thus when the souls descend, they never lose entirely their “interior (intellectual) life.”¹⁰⁰

Aquinas will be less willing to speak of a descent of the soul; nonetheless, he does hold that the agent intellect is a participated form of the divine self-knowing, and has the unity of light, of the illuminated, and of illumining upon which knowing depends. Reasoning presupposes an already kindled intellectual fire. For Thomas, we know the first principles in virtue of an “active and completed potency.”¹⁰¹

Steel brings us to the doctrine of the three states of the universal when he treats the connection between the reasons innate in the soul and the universals derived from sense perception. The first are awakened in us by the activity which produces the second, and only by the two together can we arrive at true universals, i.e., universals which are not barren abstractions from which every particularity has been removed, but rather universals which contain the particulars which emerge from them. Smit showed us that, for similar reasons, Aquinas judged the agent intellect must bring a content to knowing. In explicating Proclus, Steel writes that his most fundamental argument against a purely empiricist Aristotelianism:

is that if there are no *a priori* reasons in our mind the formation of universals by reasoning from sense-perception is not even possible. For how can one explain that only humans are capable of this abstraction-process?... [Human souls] are called “rational” (*logikoi*), which does not mean only that they can dispose of a formal faculty of reasoning, but that they have an *a priori* content of thought. The souls are *logikoi* because they are in their being the *pleroma* of *logoi*. Without these *a priori* reasons in the soul, no sensible information could ever be transformed into true universal knowledge.¹⁰²

Steel moves on from Proclus to the *De Anima* commentary of pseudo-Simplicius, identified by him with Priscianus. He finds, in language which we shall recognise as close to that of Aquinas, the interplay between what is innate in the soul and what it discovers by abstraction: “The *agent intellect* corresponds to that reasoning activity which is permanently present in the

99. *Ibid.* 298, quoting Proclus, *In Alc.* 192, 2–4.

100. *Ibid.*, quoting Proclus, *In Alc.* 189, 7.

101. Aquinas, *De Veritate* 11.1 *corpus*, pars 2, p. 351, line 281: *potentia activa completa*.

102. Steel, “Breathing Thought” 302.

essence... of the soul. This is as it were the “breathing thought” of the soul, a rational activity in virtue of its being”¹⁰³

Other scholars are investigating the same aspect of Proclean thought. Gregory MacIsaac attends to the relation between *noesis* and *dianoia*. In two recent articles, he makes clear three points in respect to Proclus which Aquinas never tires of making: (1) *dianoia* depends upon *noesis* and lives on it, but (2) it thinks according to its own proper mode, and (3) in consequence, self-knowledge is not immediately attainable for soul:

[T]he soul is not immediately conscious of its own essential *logoi*, and possesses them as if breathing, or like a heartbeat. In order to make this hidden content of its own *ousia* explicit to itself, the soul must draw them forth through what Proclus calls projection (*probolê*).¹⁰⁴

To indicate how these Proclean doctrines reach Aquinas, I point to work of Kevin Corrigan. He has recently re-examined Thomas’ doctrine that the soul does not know its own essence directly—a doctrine usually associated with his following of Aristotle—in order to connect it with the Iamblichan-Proclean understanding of how the soul comes to self-knowledge. Corrigan takes us to Propositions 15 and 83 of the *Elements of Theology*: “All which is capable of turning toward itself is incorporeal” and “All which is capable of self-knowledge is capable of every form of self-reversion.” Thus, for Proclus: “*D’un côté, ... l’auto-réflexion immédiate des êtres incorporels est l’essence de la connaissance de soi. D’un autre côté, ceci n’exclut pas des formes inférieures de connaissance de soi, même par la perception et le raisonnement, mais elles ne sont pas l’essence de la connaissance de soi.*” In relation to Proclus, Corrigan puts Thomas’ doctrine this way: “*D’où la conception de Thomas d’Aquin pour qui l’âme incarnée ne se connaît pas par sa propre essence mais seulement par ses actes (ST Q. 87, a. 2), puisque l’âme intellectuelle est tournée vers des espèces et des phantasmata dérivés de la perception sensible.*”¹⁰⁵

103. *Ibid.* 306.

104. D.G. MacIsaac, “Projection and Time in Proclus,” *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition* 83–105 at 96; see *idem*, *The Soul and Discursive Reason in the Philosophy of Proclus*, PhD dissertation for the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, 2001; *idem*, “Phantasia between Soul and Body in Proclus’ Euclid Commentary,” *Dionysius* 19 (2001): 125–36 and J.J. O’Cleary, “The Role of Mathematics in Proclus’ Theology,” *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne* 65–90.

105. K. Corrigan, “L’Auto-réflexivité et l’expérience humaine dans l’*Ennéade* V, 3 [49], et autres traités: de Plotin à Thomas d’Aquin,” *Études sur Plotin*, éd. M. Fattal (Paris/Montreal: L’Harmattan, 2000) 149–72 at 157: “The immediate self-reflection of incorporeal beings is the essence of self-knowledge. On the other side, this does not exclude some inferior forms of self-knowledge, even by means of perception and reasoning, but they are not the essence of self-knowledge. Whence arises the position of Aquinas for whom the incarnate soul does not know itself by its own essence but only by its acts (ST 1.87.2), since the intellectual soul is turned toward the forms and the phantasms derived from sensible perception.” See *idem*,

A line can be traced from Plotinus through Porphyry, Proclus and the *Liber de causis* which delivers to Aquinas this distinction between what has immediate self-knowledge and what knows itself only by means of its acts.¹⁰⁶ Proposition 15 of the *Liber de causis* states: “Every knower knows its essence. Therefore, it reverts to its essence with a complete reversion.”¹⁰⁷ Thomas attributes self-knowledge to incorporeal beings in virtue of a *reditio completa*. By arguments drawn from the *Liber* and from the Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas shows in the *Summa theologiae* that God must have self-knowledge. However, self-reversion and self-knowledge belong by essence only to what is simple, separate, and incorporeal. What is composite must be brought into act by the exterior in order to know itself. In consequence, Aquinas denies to humans both simple being and immediate self-knowledge. Science in divided human souls is the union of divine self-knowledge—which we participate through the stamp of the agent intellect—with knowledge derived from sense which the abstracting work of the intellect enables.

V. OUR INTELLECTUAL LIGHT AND THE VISION OF GOD

Timothy Smith has just published a treatment of Thomas’ trinitarian theology which aims to counterbalance the recent stress on the influence of Neoplatonic negative theology mediated through Dionysius and to correct the apophatic interpretation of Thomas’ statements on how we know and name God. His argument endeavours to show that, for Aquinas, God is properly known as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit both in this present life and in the beatific vision. For example, Smith sees Aquinas as reconciling “the apophaticism of John of Damascus and Ps.Dionysius” on the one hand with “the scriptural affirmation” on the other.¹⁰⁸ He relies in part on *La Vision béatifique* of Christian Trottmann in order to define the character and originality of Thomas’ teaching *vis-à-vis* Dionysius and thirteenth-century theologians.¹⁰⁹ He might equally have used Trottmann’s *Théologie et Noétique au XIII^e siècle* which stresses the originality of Aquinas both in respect to his intellectualism and in “son affirmation contre l’avis de tous ses prédécesseurs

“Quelques problèmes posés par l’anthropologie de Plotin et la conception de ‘soi-même’ dans le traité V, 3,” in *La Connaissance de soi: études sur le traité 49 de Plotin*, Monique Dixsaut (dir.), Tradition de la pensée classique (Paris: Vrin, 2002) 133–56 For the argument see my “Between and Beyond Augustine and Descartes: More than a Source of the Self,” *Augustinian Studies* 32:1 (2001): 65–88 at 84–85.

106. See Corrigan, “L’Auto-réflexivité” 157–59 and Hankey, *God in Himself* 96ff.

107. Aquinas, *Super Librum De Causis* Prop. 15a, p. 88: *Omnis sciens scit essentiam suam, ergo est rediens ad essentiam suam reditione completa.*

108. Timothy L. Smith, *Thomas Aquinas’ Trinitarian Theology: A Study in Theological Method* (Washington: Catholic U of America P, 2003) 52.

109. *Ibid.* 52–53, 60, 206 citing Christian, Trottmann, *La Vision béatifique: des disputes scolastiques à sa définition par Benoît XII* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1995).

et contemporains, et même son maître saint Albert le Grand, du caractère principalement spéculatif de la théologie.”¹¹⁰

When stressing the kataphatic character of Thomistic theology, Smith asserts that Thomas insists on “a continuity between truths naturally known and those revealed.”¹¹¹ As part of this argument he reminds us that, for Aquinas, “revealed language ... pertains to God *in se* As imperfect and incomplete as our naming may be, it does indeed refer to God properly.”¹¹² Concerning the beatific vision Smith writes:

It is one of Thomas’ most famous yet fiercely contested points that there is a continuity in the manner of knowing between this life and the next, through phantasms or intelligible species formed in the agent intellect. In the next life the intelligible species formed in our intellect will be replaced with the intelligible form known as the “light of glory,” the medium under which God is seen. The intellect will not simply have possession of a better similitude but will in fact be a “glorified faculty,” made more “potent” for seeing the divine essence.¹¹³

The intellectualism which both Trottmann and Smith claim for Aquinas has been supported by our study. However, we must note that, in contrast to Smith, Trottmann insists, in fact, on the *discontinuity* between our manner of knowing in this life and in the beatific vision.¹¹⁴

Leaving aside the question of the balance of apophatic and kataphatic directions in Thomas’ theology, I judge that my analysis of the nature and sources of his doctrine of the agent intellect supports Smith’s assertion of a continuity between the natural and the revealed truths and between how humans know in this life and in the life of the world to come. Indeed, we can now assert an even greater continuity in Aquinas between natural scientific knowledge and divine science, and between our knowledge now and our contemplation of God in glory than Smith claims. This is because of what the agent intellect brings to abstraction—a participation in the divine intelligence by way of the knowledge of the primary concepts.

110. Christian Trottmann, *Théologie et Noétique au XIIIe siècle: A la recherche d’un statut*, Études de philosophie médiévale LXXVII (Paris: Vrin, 1999) 155–56.

111. Smith, *Thomas Aquinas’ Trinitarian Theology* 233.

112. *Ibid.* 233.

113. *Ibid.* 51.

114. See Christian Trottmann, “Connaissance *in via*, vision *in patria*. La théologie scolastique naissante en quête d’un statut Noétique: Une autocritique médiévale de la raison dans son usage le plus pur,” in *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter*, ed. Jan A. Aertsen and Andreas Speer, *Miscellanea Mediaevalia* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1998) 961–68 and Kent Emory, “A Forced March Towards Beatitude: Christian Trottmann’s *Histoire* of the Beatific Vision,” *Vivarium* 37:2 (1999): 258–81.

The ultimate account of human knowing for Aquinas comes not from Dionysius but from Augustine and the doctrine of the beatific vision he bequeathed the Latin church. The most important discussion of beatitude occurs in Question 12 of the *Summa theologiae* on how God is known by us; there Aquinas makes his beginning by arguing that both philosophy and faith demand human vision of the essence of God. Without face-to-face knowledge, faith would be nullified because its purpose is human beatitude: “Since the final happiness of man consists in his highest activity, which is intellectual activity, if no created intellect could see God, either it would never achieve happiness, or its happiness would consist in something other than God. This is foreign to faith.”¹¹⁵ Reason, in turn, would be denied. It is fulfilled in the knowledge of the principles and causes. This frustrated, man’s natural desire would be vain. Both faith and reason require that “the blessed see the essence of God.”¹¹⁶ Later in this question, we find Thomas’ notorious doctrine of created grace which he developed in order to explain how we can have the demanded knowledge of God’s essence. Much criticised, it is, nonetheless, determined by Thomas’ desire to preserve the integrity of human nature until the end even when we are united to God. This he does by connecting our final state to the form of knowing peculiar to us, that by abstraction.

Aquinas confronts grave problems in arguing for human knowledge of the divine essence. These ultimately reduce to the incapacity of the creature for the creator and of the human mind for the knowledge of separated substance. Because of the first God cannot be adequately known through an intermediating likeness: no concept, by nature finite, can convey the uncreated infinity. Beatifying union must be immediate. However, humans have some capacity for knowing separate substance and to this a gracious addition can be made:

Since the created intellect through its own innate nature is able to apprehend concrete form and the concrete act of being in abstraction by way of a certain kind of analysis, it is able through grace to be raised so that it can know subsisting separated substance and separated subsistent being.¹¹⁷

Divine grace gives a power to the creature in order, by an addition, to raise its natural created capacity beyond its natural scope, i.e., forms in matter. Grace

115. Aquinas, *ST* 1.12.1: *Cum enim ultima hominis beatitudo in altissima eius operatione consistat, quae est operatio intellectus, si numquam essentiam Dei videre potest intellectus creatus, vel numquam beatitudinem obtinebit, vel in alio eius beatitudo consistet quam in Deo. Quod est alienum a fide.*

116. *Ibid.* “*beati Dei essentiam videant.*”

117. *ST* 1.12.4 *ad* 3: *Et ideo, cum intellectus creatus per suam naturam natus sit apprehendere formam concretam et esse concretum in abstractione per modum resolutionis cuiusdam, potest per gratiam elevari ut cognoscat substantiam separatam subsistentem, et esse separatum subsistens.*

continues, even at this absolute limit of creaturely existence, to conform itself to the specific nature of the creature. Put another way, the knowledge of God given by the light of glory far beyond our natural limits adapts itself to the way humans naturally participate in God's uncreated light so that the ladder of the *Lex divinitatis* is not broken. Every difference is maintained and every extreme is mediated. We shall be made "*deiformis*," by means of the light of glory without ceasing to be human.¹¹⁸

118. *ST* 1.12.5 *ad* 3: *Per hoc enim lumen [gloriae] fit creatura rationalis deiformis . . .*