

PART II

The Ideas of Reform and the Intellectuals

Chapter 3

Self and Cosmos in Becoming Deiform: Neoplatonic Paradigms for Reform by Self-knowledge from Augustine to Aquinas

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The means by which I shall approach our topic is modest: I seek only to update the oldest and the best known of stories about the history of philosophy in the Latin Middle Ages, providing some new footnotes drawn from the scholarship of the last sixty years. These will place the move from the self-conscious Platonism of Augustine to the Aristotelianism of the thirteenth-century theologians within the histories of Neoplatonism and Arabic Peripateticism. Although only footnotes, they have significant consequences. They enable us to understand the turn to the natural cosmos, which the retrieval of Aristotle entailed, both as constituting philosophy's independence vis-à-vis sacred doctrine and also as occurring within the conversion of the soul to deiformity by way of self-knowledge. In consequence, it becomes evident that the turn to nature and to a complete Aristotelian account of the cosmos remains within obedience to the Delphic *Gnothi seauton*. The divine demand to "Know yourself," conveyed by the oracle, is transformed so as to remain the essence of spiritual reform for the religious, philosophical, and theological traditions which are the heirs of Hellenism.¹

The story, both in its older and in its new telling, is about reform in two senses and involves markedly opposed processes of ecclesiastical reform. Above all, it is about what must be the most fundamental reform for Christians insofar as their religion retains its original Hellenistic character: the journey to God is a personal transformation toward deiformity by self-

¹ For a partial history see my "'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 (January 2003), 23–48. In what follows I frequently refer to my own published work in order to reduce the citations otherwise required.

knowledge. My aim will be to show how reform in this sense is as much Thomistic as it is Augustinian. Further, the story is about how, in the course of a millennium, Latin Christianity, both in reaction to changed circumstances, and also by interior self-development, shifted radically from one understanding of the psychic structure of this *itinerarium*, and from one understanding of how philosophy stands to *sacra doctrina*, to their contraries. In the course of our retelling, we shall notice that the old story was loved within a reform of the Church's intellectual life initiated from its Roman center as a reaction against modernity. The Second Vatican Council was, in considerable part, a response to this neo-Neoscholasticism; it rebalanced the Church after the distortion caused by the ecclesiastical manipulation of its intellectual life following Vatican I. A revered progenitor and *peritus* of the Council, Père M.-D. Chenu, persecuted by the Holy Office for attempting accurate historical study of the period we are considering, judged that the Leonine use of Aquinas as a weapon against modernity entailed a "misérable abus."² When studying reform in the Catholic Church, we must remember that the innovative doctrines of St. Thomas, by which he effected the most fundamental and radical of medieval metamorphoses, were condemned by the episcopal authorities of his time. The most fundamental of reforms, the spiritual and intellectual, can be neither compelled nor prevented by authority.

As the Church undergoes yet another millennial shift which shows signs of requiring thorough transformations, I retell the old story, first, so that we are reminded of which reform is essential in the Church; second, because hearing it again encourages us when we recollect how greatly we have been transformed even in the "Dark Ages"; and last, because the story manifests the limits of ecclesiastical power in respect to what is most important in the Church. Remembering this reduces both expectation and fear.

I. The Old Story: From Augustine's Platonism to the Aristotelianism of Aquinas

The old story is relatively straightforward, remains what most people who know a little about medieval philosophy think to be true and, altered, can still be told with verisimilitude. Augustine, partly through his Christian teachers

²M.-D. Chenu, "L'interprete de saint Thomas d'Aquin," *Étienne Gilson et Nous: La philosophie et son histoire*, ed. Monique Couratier (Paris, 1980), 43–4. On the character of Chenu's work, see "Hommage au père M. D. Chenu," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 75, 3 (1991); "Le projet historique du P. Chenu," in *Penser avec Thomas d'Aquin: Etudes thomistes de Louis-Bretrand Geiger OP*, présentées par Ruedi Imbach, Pensée antique et médiévale (Paris- Fribourg, 2000), xvi–xviii.

of whom the most important was Ambrose and partly through a direct encounter with Neoplatonism by way of translations of the *libri platoniorum*, including at least some of the *Enneads*, chose a Platonism that certainly enabled his Christian baptism and is supposed by some to have been confused with it.³ His reading of Aristotle was probably confined to the *Categories*, of which he made a crucially important negative and characteristically Neoplatonic use in coming to his doctrine of the Trinity, but for which, like Plotinus, he had not a high regard. While much of Plotinus is echoed in Augustine, the bishop does not adopt his characteristic doctrine of the One and his Platonism is in general more intellectual than that of the founder of what we call “Neoplatonism.”⁴ Later Greek Neoplatonism entered the Latin intellectual world in the sixth century by way of Boethius and, in the ninth through the Dionysian *corpus*, translated and doctrinally assimilated by John Scottus Eriugena. The Platonism of Boethius was sufficiently generalized to be compatible with that of Augustine, as were the Platonisms of Calcidius and Macrobius.⁵ Because of Eriugena’s following of the pseudo-Areopagite’s negative theology, and his deeply philosophical mind, both of which got his work condemned, Latin theology remained altogether dominated by Augustine at least until the time of Anselm of Canterbury. Indeed, the textbook by Peter Lombard, which “did more than any other text to shape the discipline of medieval scholastic theology,”⁶ was so deeply formed structurally, doctrinally, and through quotation by Augustine that Josef Pieper called it “a systematically organized Augustinian breviary.”⁷

Soon after the *Four Books of Sentences* were completed in the middle of the twelfth century, things changed very rapidly. Translations from Greek and Arabic provided so much Aristotle that, by 1268,⁸ Thomas Aquinas gave, as

³ For example, Augustine, *Confessions* 7, *Contra Academicos* 3, *De Civitate Dei* 8.

⁴ Augustine, *Confessions* 4.16 and *De Trinitate* 5; for a survey of the scholarship on Augustine’s Platonism and a judicious treatment of his intellectualism, see R. D. Crouse, “*Paucis mutatis verbis*: St. Augustine’s Platonism,” in *Augustine and his Critics*, ed. R. J. Dodaro and G. P. Lawless (London and New York, 1999), 37–50; Phillip Cary, *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (New York, 2000) makes the case but overstates it.

⁵ See on the Latin Platonic tradition, Stephen Gersh, “The Medieval Legacy from Ancient Platonism,” *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, 2002), 3–30.

⁶ Marcia Colish, “Peter Lombard,” *The Medieval Theologians*, ed. G. R. Evans (Oxford, 2001), 168–83, at 182.

⁷ J. Pieper, *Scholasticism: Personalities and Problems of Medieval Philosophy*, trans. R. and C. Winston (London, 1961), 98.

⁸ For the most part, when dating the works of Aquinas, I rely on G. Emery, “Bref catalogue des oeuvres de saint Thomas,” in J.-P. Torrell, *Initiation à saint Thomas d’Aquin. Sa personne et son oeuvre*, Pensée antique et médiévale, Vestigia 13 (Paris–Fribourg, 1993).

his philosophical beginning point, a complete account of the cosmos offered by reason apart from faith. The very first article of the first question of the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*, asking whether there is a need for *sacra doctrina*, begins with the argument that: “whatever is not above reason is fully treated in philosophical science. Therefore, besides philosophical science, there is no need of any further knowledge” (*ST* I.1.1 obj. 1).⁹ The philosophical sciences providing this complete account are attributed to Aristotle, but, in fact, the establishment of a philosophical world over against the theological was owed to the genius of the Arabs. They mediated the texts of Aristotle to the Latins as “a total philosophic corpus, into which the whole of Hellenistic thought, profoundly neoplatonised, had surreptitiously crept.”¹⁰

Augustine had spoken of Christianity as “true philosophy.”¹¹ Following him, when philosophy is identified with *intellectus* or wisdom, an identification Eriugena explicitly made on Augustine’s authority, and when *fides* gives us the same content but in a form inadequate to reason, we arrive at Anselm’s *fides quaerens intellectum*, which quotes Augustine, though silently.¹² The silence of Anselm in respect to authorities is intentional; *intellectus* surpasses what we know on authority. When, in its inward and upward quest for God, the soul finds its deiform rationality, it knows through the structure of its own reasoning the content of faith according to *rationes necessariae*. The existence and attributes of God, the Trinity, and the Incarnation become a series of *intelligibilia* known independently of faith.¹³ Only thus known are they properly known.

Aquinas dealt with the massive invasion of the new philosophy by treating it in the opposite way. For the Arabic philosophers, faith belonged to

⁹ For the significance of this beginning within Thomas’ world, see Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford, 2002), 12–14.

¹⁰ Alain de Libera, *Penser au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1991), 20. For brief description of this Aristotelianism, see his *La querelle des universaux: De Platon à la fin du Moyen Âge*, Des travaux (Paris, 1996), 117 and 68–124.

¹¹ Augustine, *Contra Julianum* 4.14.72; see *De Vera Religione* 5.8.

¹² Eriugena, *De divina predestinatione* I, PL 357–8 (*Treatise on Divine Predestination*, trans. Mary Brennan, Notre Dame texts in Medieval Culture, vol. 5 (Notre Dame, Ind., 1998) c. 1, § 1, pp. 7–8) and Anselm, *Proslogion* c. 1 (*S. Anselmi cantuariensis archiepiscopi opera omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt, 6 vols. (Edinburgh, 1946) [hereafter Schmitt], i, 100).

¹³ See Anselm, *Proslogion* c. 4 (Schmitt, i, 104) in respect to the existence of God; the *Monologion* deduces the Trinity and the *Cur Deus Homo* the Incarnation. For method, see the *Prooemium* of the *Monologion* (Schmitt, i, 7); in the *Prooemium* of the *Proslogion* the requirement of deiformity is made. For an analysis of the logic of the quest see W. J. Hankey, “*Secundum rei vim vel secundum cognoscentium 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, 2002), 126–50, at 134–41.

representation and to a faculty inferior to reason. Thomas followed both them and his Augustinian predecessors by distinguishing between the modalities of faith and reason. This done, he turns the tables in respect to both. For the first time in the Latin Middle Ages, a theologian engaged the philosophers on their own terrain as a separate, limited, and subordinate sphere, and, in opposition to both the Arabs and the Augustinians, Thomas made a humbled but quasi-autonomous philosophy into the servant of revealed theology.¹⁴ Faith now knew things philosophy could never reach. In Aquinas' view, the demand of his Augustinian adversaries that things which only faith could know – the temporal beginning of the world, the Trinity, a universal, individual, and immediate providence – be rationally proved only brought error and disrepute on theology. The ladder of the philosophical sciences constitutes them as *praeambula* by which the human mind, for which the understanding of the intellectual beings is unnatural, gains the strength for knowing, in the very limited measure of which it is capable, the mysteries standing both above scientific *ratio* and above the metaphysical wisdom toward which reason ascends.

Very many others in the thirteenth century were not convinced that the threat to Christian faith posed by Aristotle could be overcome intellectually, nor were persuaded that Aquinas had made him serve it. Thus, from 1210, when a synod at Sens forbade Aristotle's natural (as opposed to his logical) treatises, we have persistent, though ineffective, bans on teaching Aristotle's works. Condemnations followed, most importantly those of 1270 and 1277 by the archbishop of Paris, which included articles held by scholars for whom the Arab Peripatetic tradition defined what reason knows; some of the condemned propositions may be held to touch Aquinas himself.¹⁵ In 1284, the Franciscan archbishop of Canterbury, John Pecham, had the Oxford divinity faculty confirm the condemnation in 1277 of a list of propositions issued by his Dominican predecessor.¹⁶ Two years later, furious about the

¹⁴ See Alain de Libera, *La philosophie médiévale*, 2nd edn. (Paris, 1993), 411; W. J. Hankey, "Why Philosophy Abides for Aquinas," *The Heythrop Journal* 42, 3 (2001), 329–48; on Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* [hereafter *ST*] 1.5 ad 2, see R. D. Crouse, "St. Thomas, St. Albert, Aristotle: *Philosophia Ancilla Theologiae*," *Atti del Congresso Internazionale Tommaso nel suo settimo centenario*, i (Naples, 1975), 181–5.

¹⁵ For a brief history of the condemnations of the thirteenth century, including those against the Greeks and Eriugena, see de Libera, *La philosophie médiévale* 413–17; also there are *La Condamnation Parisienne de 1277*, new edn of the Latin text, trans. intro. and commentary David Piché, *Sic et Non* (Paris, 1999) art. 89, 107; F.-X. Putallaz and R. Imbach, *Profession philosophe: Siger de Brabant*, Initiations au Moyen Âge (Paris, 1997), 171–2; J. F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and the Condemnation of 1277," *The Modern Schoolman* 72 (1995), 233–72; and Isabel Iribarren, "'Responsio secundum Thomam' and the Search for an Early Thomistic School," *Vivarium* 39, 2 (2001), 253–96.

¹⁶ Fergus Kerr, "Thomas Aquinas," in Evans, *The Medieval Theologians*, 201–20, at 208.

“destruction and erosion” of “the whole teaching of Augustine,” Peckham, with Thomas as well as others in his sights, declared heretical a teaching central to Aquinas which derived from Aristotle.¹⁷ Scholars group as “Augustinian” the opposition to this new *scientia* because of its doctrines of how soul and body are united, of how humans know, of how faith and reason are related, and of what reason owed to faith, as well as because of its explicit partisan alliance with the preeminent Latin Father.¹⁸ There are problems with this designation, not the least of which is the enthusiasm for Dionysius among those covered by it, but, in general, the opposition was reacting both against much of what the new philosophy taught and against the moral stance implied by its independence.¹⁹ In fact, these so-called neo-Augustinians had imbibed a great deal of Aristotle. The first two of the seven steps by which Bonaventure, the Minister General of the Franciscans, described the mind’s ascent in his *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* depend upon an Aristotelian turn to the sensible cosmos below the soul. Nor are these outwardly turned steps in the soul’s deification the last places where Aristotle’s thinking underlies Bonaventure’s account of its journey.

Historians no longer follow Étienne Gilson in judging Thomas to have occupied the summit at the height of medieval philosophy, which, after him, fell into decadence in the fourteenth century. Diversity, intense conflict, and innovation continued. Dante, the greatest medieval heir of the independence that intellectuals attained in the thirteenth century, rightly depicts the complex contrariety essential to scholastic thought in the Heaven of the Sun of his *Paradiso*. There the circle of Bonaventure balances that of Aquinas, who is seated next to the same Siger of Brabant whose Arab Aristotelianism he had opposed so fiercely in the Parisian Faculty of Arts. Dante portrays Aquinas as reconciled in heaven with Siger.²⁰ Thomas had to wait until the

¹⁷ Peckham to the Bishop of Lincoln, quoted in Alain Boureau, *Théologie, science et censure au XIII^e siècle. Le cas de Jean Peckham, L’âne d’or* (Paris, 1999), 31. The crucial passage is also quoted in F.-X. Putallaz, *Figures Franciscaines de Bonaventure à Duns Scot*, Initiations au Moyen Âge (Paris, 1997), 46–7, which criticizes scholarly characterizations of the supposed “neo-Augustinianism” of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and endeavours to “décentrer l’analyse traditionnelle” (p. 17).

¹⁸ For the complex historiography, see Putallaz and Imbach, *Profession philosophe* and Putallaz, *Figures Franciscaines*.

¹⁹ For problems with the designation, see W. J. Hankey, “‘Magis . . . Pro Nostra Sententia’: John Wyclif, his Mediaeval Predecessors and Reformed Successors, and a pseudo-Augustinian Eucharistic Decretal,” *Augustiniana* 45, 3–4 (1995), 213–45, at 235–9.

²⁰ J. Marenbon, “Dante’s Averroism,” *Poetry and Philosophy in the Middle Ages: A Festschrift for Peter Dronke*, ed. J. Marenbon (Leiden, 2001), 349–74, at 366–9 and R. D. Crouse, “Dante as Philosopher: Christian Aristotelianism,” *Dionysius* 16 (1998), 141–56 use different arguments to draw this conclusion: on Dante see Ruedi Imbach, *Dante, la philosophie et les laïcs*, Initiations à la philosophie médiévale (Paris–Fribourg, 1996).

Counter-Reformation to become generally authoritative, being named Doctor of the Church in 1567.²¹ Nonetheless, he was canonized in 1323 and, in 1325, the archbishop of Paris annulled the condemnation of 1277 so far as it touched him.²² In 1346, Pope Clement VI blamed some of the masters and students of Paris for “disregarding and despising the time-honoured writings of the Philosopher” and, shortly thereafter, the study of Aristotle was effectively required as part of the preparation of the theologians.²³ Practicing philosophy as commentary according to methods he learned from Greek and Arab Neoplatonists and Peripatetics, Thomas rectified philosophy from within its own logic and history.²⁴ Great dispute continues about whether philosophy for Aquinas and Christian medievals had any real autonomy or what kind it had. These controversies are moved largely by our own questions about the relations of religion and reason as Pierre Hadot’s reasons for asserting that philosophy lost its capacity to be a way of life in the western Middle Ages exhibit.²⁵ The “Christian philosophy” of Étienne Gilson’s anti-modernism has been succeeded by the postmodern efforts of Jean-Luc Marion, and John Milbank, and many others, which endeavor an even more radical reduction of philosophy to theology.²⁶ Nonetheless, Thomas’ *sortie*

²¹ On the distortion of the understanding of medieval philosophy consequent on placing Thomas at its summit, see, for example, Pierre Magnard, “La Recherche en la philosophie médiévale et renaissante,” *La Recherche philosophique en France. Bilan et Perspectives*, rapport de la commission présidée par Pierre Magnard et Yves Charles Zarka (Paris, 1996), 162–71; W. J. Hankey, “From Metaphysics to History, from Exodus to Neoplatonism, from Scholasticism to Pluralism: The Fate of Gilsonian Thomism in English-speaking North America,” *Dionysius* 16 (1998), 157–88, at 178–88; Putallaz, *Figures Franciscaines*; de Libera, *La philosophie*, 420; for alternative approaches, see Philipp W. Rosemann, “A Change of Paradigm in the Study of Medieval Philosophy: From Rationalism to Postmodernism,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72, 1 (1998), 59–73, at 63–7.

²² Torrell, *Initiation*, 471–5.

²³ E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (1st edn. 1955; London, 1980), 471.

²⁴ For what he did, and how he did it, see Thomas d’Aquin, *L’Unité de l’intellect contre les Averroïstes suivi des Textes contre Averroès antérieurs à 1270*, Latin text, trans., intro., biography, chronology, notes and index A. de Libera, 2nd edn. (Paris, 1997).

²⁵ See Pierre Hadot, “Philosophy as a Way of Life,” in *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. and intro. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford, 1995) 264–76, at 270; Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 2002), 253–61; and my “Philosophy as Way of Life for Christians? Iamblichan and Porphyrian Reflections on Religion Virtue and Philosophy in Thomas Aquinas,” *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 59, 2 [Le Néoplatonisme] (June 2003), 193–224.

²⁶ See J. Milbank and C. Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, Radical Orthodoxy (London and New York, 2001); J.-L. Marion, “Saint Thomas d’Aquin et l’onto-théo-logie,” *Revue thomiste* 95, 1 (1995), 31–66; W. J. Hankey, “Denys and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold and Postmodern Hot,” *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community*, ed.

into philosophy's *camp de Mars* in the Faculty of Arts was crucial to the expansion of the mind of Western Christendom that made it the mother of secular modernity.

II. Why we love to tell it

This, then, is the millennium-long road by which Latin theology turned from a Platonism in which God and the soul engaged in a face-to-face dialogue, allowing direct access to the *intellectus fidei*, to an Aristotelianism in which deformity requires passage by way of the cosmic order, known in the philosophical sciences that human reason constructs, serving faith beyond reason's power.²⁷ A significant part of the attraction of this story, especially for Catholics, who, in the nineteenth century, revived scholasticism, and who remain those primarily interested in medieval philosophy,²⁸ was its account of the escape from the subjectivity associated with the inward turn and self-certainty of Augustinian Platonism. This subjectivity was supposed to be at the root of what is problematic in modernity. Thomas' Aristotelian anthropology, with its outward movement to the sensible followed by a cosmological ascent, and the objectivity of his metaphysics, countered this. His acceptance of ancillary philosophical sciences would come to be seen as conceding to modern rational autonomy what is proper to it, but equally as limiting it vis-à-vis revealed theology and mystical union, and became central to the Church's anti-modern campaign.²⁹

When the beginning, middle, and end of this account are examined in light of scholarly developments, the result will be to change, indeed, almost to reverse some of the reasons for which it has been told. Before going on to

Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones, *Studies in Christian Origins* (London–New York, 1998), 139–84; Hankey, “*Theoria versus Poesis*: Neoplatonism and Trinitarian Difference in Aquinas, John Milbank, Jean-Luc Marion and John Zizioulas,” *Modern Theology* 15, 4 (October 1999), 387–415 and “Why Philosophy Abides.”

²⁷ There is a succinct account of these sciences in Bonaventura, *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* c. 3, §6; Thomas gives his doctrine of the hierarchy of the sciences and their relation to the soul's powers of abstraction in questions 5 and 6 of his *Super Boetium De Trinitate* (Leonine 50).

²⁸ Hankey, “Denys and Aquinas” and “From Metaphysics to History”, 165–6, and de Libera, *Penser*, 49–50.

²⁹ Perhaps the best telling of the story with these reasons is Étienne Gilson, *Le Thomisme* in several importantly different editions, translated once as *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, and again as *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*. For critical accounts, see W. J. Hankey, “‘Dionysius dixit, Lex divinitatis est ultima per media reducere’: Aquinas, hierocracy and the ‘augustinisme politique,’” in *Tommaso D’Aquino: proposte nuove di letture. Festschrift Antonio Tognolo*, ed. Ilario Tolomio, *Medioevo. Rivista di Storia della Filosofia Medievale*, 18 (Padova, 1992), 119–50, and “From Metaphysics to History”, *passim*.

these revisions, let us linger in order to note something of the reform, in the sense of life-preserving and enhancing self-transformation, contained in what remains of the old story. Because of problems we shall confront later, I leave aside the question of whether, or in what sense, there is, in fact, a move from Platonism to Aristotelianism as the philosophical prism through which the light of the gospel is seen and refracted. Nonetheless, in the thousand-year shift just sketched, we have a move which is not only an adaptation to new circumstances, but also an interior development of the Christian self. Generalizing very roughly, Augustine, in contrast with Aquinas, served the Latin Church when its intellectual life was centred in the episcopal *curia* and monastery, when it passed from the declining Latin Roman Empire to the Europe of the barbarians. The Benedictine monastery, whose multifaceted history in this period is a story of reform, is the foundation of Christian culture in this Europe, and may serve as its symbol. Despite what is represented by Normans and Venetians, by Charlemagne and Eriugena, this Latin world was largely cut off from or threatened by the Byzantine and Islamic. In contrast, Aquinas belongs to a Europe which has not only re-established connection with the Greek and Arabic, but also is engaged with them both positively and negatively. The physical, economic, aesthetic, intellectual, and religious worlds have all increased enormously in size and diversity; the other is within as well as without. The wandering mendicant accommodates the Church to this new reality. A Dominican will be found in the East learning Greek and Arabic and translating Aristotle, Avicenna or Proclus; or he will have found his mission among the Cathars or in northern cities bursting with the new trade and commerce; or, like Aquinas he will be teaching at a university where nations, faculties, intellectual, and ecclesiastical parties meet and fight in the manner both represented by and enacted in the *disputatio*.³⁰ The university, and even Christendom itself, replaces the monastery as the *dominici schola servitii*.³¹

This adaptation and development is more than institutional and formal; there are fundamental transformations of the content. Some of them have already been suggested: the establishment of philosophical reason in a relation of mutual limitation with the revealed, the soul as form of the body

³⁰ For Aquinas in relation to these realities, see John Inglis, "Emanation in Historical Context: Aquinas and the Dominican Response to the Cathars," *Dionysius* 17 (1999), 93–128; W. J. Hankey, "Thomas' Neoplatonic Histories: His following of Simplicius," *Dionysius* 20 (2002), 153–78; Kerr, *After Aquinas*, 210.

³¹ *Regula Sancti Benedicti*, prologus; Aquinas, *Contra Impugnantes* (Leonine 41), c 3, § 7, p. A 68 where the pope is treated as head of a universal Christian republic; G. B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform*, rev. edn. (New York, 1967), 424; Hankey, "'Dionysius dixit,'" 147–50; de Libera, *Penser*, 12–13; Hadot, "Philosophy as a Way of Life," 269–70; and *What is Ancient Philosophy*, 237–52.

and, by nature, turned to the sensible, and so on. Rather than repeat and elaborate these, I point to what seems most basic and most radical: the move from human knowing as seeing to knowing as making. For Aquinas, in opposition to Augustine, we do not know through the ideas seen above us in the Divine Word in virtue of an illumination from outside ourselves of which the sun is the image. Instead, he judges that we know by the activity of an inherent intellectual light, a power essential to each human soul and given each by God.³² This light creates the universal in our minds, which are passive as well as active.³³ Fergus Kerr, situating Thomas' understanding of how we know in relation to twentieth-century epistemological debates, brings out the radical character of its assimilation of self and cosmos strikingly, for Thomas:

the objects out there in the world become intelligible in the act of awakening the intellectual acts on our part which manifest our intelligence. . . . [What] we find in Thomas may be put in terms of a contrast between a "subjectivist-observing" perspective and an "objective-participant" one. . . . [He pictures the mind] as the actualization of intellectual capacities by potentially significant objects, according to the axiom "*intellectus in actu est intelligibile in actu*": our intellectual capacities are the world's intelligibility realized.³⁴

The power of each mind is increased by reaching higher levels of abstraction, by rising to and becoming one with higher levels of reality.³⁵ The human power and mode of knowing is situated midway in a spiritual hierarchy; the most revealing and determinative account of the universe is as a hierarchy of

³² Knowing as making enters the Latin Christian tradition with Boethius and takes its most radical form in Eriugena, see Hankey, "*Secundum rei vim*."

³³ See Hankey, "Why Philosophy Abides," 336–40 and Houston Smit, "Aquinas's Abstractionism," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10 (2001), 85–118. 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 put on the other side. The account in *ST* 1.79 makes it a dispute between Plato and Aristotle. Smit very insightfully shows how Aquinas "is aiming to reconcile his empiricism with an Augustinian doctrine of internal illumination, on which God teaches us everything through this light (*ST* 1a 84.5)" (p. 88); on this I shall say more below. For exact texts of some of Thomas' sources, see *Quaestio Disputata de Spiritualibus Creaturis*, ed. J. Cos (Leonine 24, 2), 112–13.

³⁴ Kerr, *After Aquinas*, 27.

³⁵ For a presentation of Thomas' doctrine which rescues it from Neoscholastic mechanism and the anti-modern campaigns, finds a reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle in it, and shows how it belongs to the conquering strength of the "l'esprit humain," see L-B. Geiger, "Abstraction et séparation d'après saint Thomas *In de Trinitate*, Q. 5, A. 3" as reprinted with updated references in *Penser avec Thomas d'Aquin: Etudes thomistes de Louis-Bretrand Geiger OP*, 139–83 and xxi–xxiii.

intellectual powers.³⁶ Within our own world, which the vast *Secunda Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae* describes, the sciences are a hierarchy of abstraction and separation. Constructing them is a common work,³⁷ like that of the university, and involves accepting the validity of human, temporal truth.³⁸ In helping the Western Church to accept and develop this kind of human, communal, temporal, philosophical investigation, Aquinas made his greatest contribution to modern secularity. For Thomas, creating and ascending the ladder of the sciences is the work of education, a spiritual *itinerarium* toward deiformity, and an activity necessary for understanding God's speech to us (*ST* I.1.5 ad. 2). In accord with the Islamic philosophers and Moses Maimonides, he judges that otherwise believers have supposed, and would continue to imagine, God to be corporeal and mutable.

III. Recent Precisions

As I indicated earlier, every part of the old story requires alteration in the light of scholarship, and we cannot make, or even note, all of the changes here. I shall try to indicate those essential for placing the shift from Augustine's move inward and upward as the way to deiformity to Aquinas' turn toward the sensible for the same end within Neoplatonic paradigms for reform by self-knowledge and within the Arabic systemizing of the Aristotelian *corpus*. In the last section of my essay, I shall draw out some of the changes these alterations demand in the reasons for which we might continue to tell this story.

My revised narrative distinguishes two traditions within Neoplatonism as it governs philosophical theology and the paradigms of spiritual ascent in Latin Christianity during the millennium and a half from Augustine until the seventeenth century. Both derive from Plotinus and they are emphases which demonstrate their mutuality both by their common father, and by being united within Western Christianity.³⁹ One of these is the Plotinian tradition as

³⁶ See W. J. Hankey, "Aquinas, Pseudo-Denys, Proclus and Isaiah VI.6," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 64 (1997), 59–93, and Smit, "Aquinas's Abstractionism," 97–103.

³⁷ Aquinas, *Contra Impugnantes* c. 3 (*Utrum religiosus possit esse de collegio secularium licite*), § 4, Leonine A64–A65 (secular here refers to secular clergy, but the principles used by Thomas to make his answer would extend to the university community generally).

³⁸ Aquinas, *ST* 1.16.8 ad 1: "Veritas autem intellectus nostri mutabilis est." The objections in those articles of *Questio* 16, *De Veritate* which show that truth is in minds not in things, is multiple, created, and changeable, are overwhelmingly taken from Augustine and Anselm.

³⁹ In Plotinus, compare *Ennead* 6.8 and *Ennead* 6.9; Werner Beierwaltes, "Eriugena's Platonism," *Hermathena* 149 (1990), 58–72, "Unity and Trinity in Dionysius and

developed by Porphyry and Victorinus, and which, largely through Augustine's influence, dominates the Latin West. Activity, freedom, and, supremely simplified being: the "to be," *einai*, or *esse*, are all attributed to the First Principle. The human soul, drawn by love, ascends through itself from sense and discursive reason by way of intellect to the higher faculty by which it has union. When knowing truly, it has immediate access to the ideas in the divine mind. In general, Thomas' doctrine of God – what he gives as the primary name of God and his trinitarian doctrine – derives from this tradition.⁴⁰

The other Neoplatonic tradition began in the criticism by Iamblichus of Porphyry, is most influential in the West through the pseudo-Areopagite, and gives Greek Christianity many of the characteristics differentiating it from the Latin. Its most telling features are the entire descent of the individual soul into the realm of sensible becoming, and a corresponding insistence on the transcendence of the unknown One or Good, beyond all attribution.⁴¹ In consequence, whereas the tradition in which we may locate Augustine emphasizes the intellectual, the alternative insists on the primacy for our ascent on the theurgic or sacramental. The self which most deeply mirrors the absolute source, and finds its rest there, is not that of a reflexive rationality, but of what underlies thought and moves us to union beyond knowing. One way develops a negative theology of Being; the other way develops a negative theology of the One or the Good.⁴² One arrives at *intelligibilia*. The other requires system: both because the Principle, always beyond being known, is manifested only by the totality of the whole in its difference and connection, and also because the self, immersed in the sensible, comes with difficulty to self-knowledge, which it must also surpass for the sake of the ultimate union it seeks. Crucially for our narrative, the Iamblichan–Proclean tradition

Eriugena," *Hermathena* 157 (1994), 1–20, *Platonisme et idéalisme*, Histoire de la philosophie (Paris, 2000), generally and "Postface à la traduction française," 219–26, particularly; Hankey, "Denys and Aquinas," 166–8.

⁴⁰ W. J. Hankey, *God in Himself, Aquinas' Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae*, Oxford Theological Monographs/Oxford Scholarly Classics (Oxford, 1987/2000), 3–6.

⁴¹ See Iamblichus, *De Anima: Text, translation, and commentary*, by John F. Finamore and John M. Dillon, *Philosophia Antiqua* (Leiden–Boston–Köln, 2002).

⁴² See the groundbreaking article by Pierre Aubenque, "Plotin et le dépassement de l'ontologie grecque classique," *Le Néoplatonisme (Royaumont 9–13 juin 1969)*, présentées par Pierre Hadot, Colloques internationaux du Centre National de la Recherche scientifique, Sciences humaines (Paris, 1971), 101–8. J.-M. Narbonne, *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis (Plotin-Proclus-Heidegger)*, *L'âne d'or* (Paris, 2001) 41–70 traces "the metaphysics of pure being" or a "negative theology of being," from Aquinas to Pico della Mirandola and then back to Porphyry and Victorinus, and ultimately to Plotinus. Narbonne's work considers what Neoplatonic henology and ontology have in common.

replaces the hostility toward Aristotle which we find in Plotinus and Augustine, with a positive attitude. Iamblichus and his followers not only reconcile Plato and Aristotle, but also insist on the Aristotelian sciences in the education of the soul by which she ascends toward deiformity by self-knowledge.⁴³ Aquinas' anthropology, negative theology, Aristotelianism, systemizing, and subordination of philosophy to sacramental religion belong in this tradition.⁴⁴

At least as important as identifying the characteristics of the two Neoplatonic traditions in order to account for the differences at the poles of our history, is placing both within a single differentiated – even internally conflicting – movement. This is especially important when treating the Latin Christian West, because, after Anselm, with the twelfth-century “renaissance” anticipated by Eriugena, it became common for its greatest speculative and mystical theologians to unite these two opposed pagan traditions.

One consequence of treating our story within the history of Neoplatonism is that we can no longer look directly to Plato and Aristotle to understand adequately what is philosophical in Augustine or Aquinas. Both are on our side of the Hellenistic and Neoplatonic turn to the subject. Both are primarily concerned with the quietude, salvation, or rest of the human soul, and, for both, the account of the nature of that soul – whether as the form of the body and turned to the sensible, or the contrary – is determinative. For both, because of this care for the self, philosophy needs religion, and, just as Porphyry is more bound up with religious questions and practice than is Plotinus, Augustine is moving beyond both in the direction of Iamblichus.⁴⁵ Despite his polemics, Plotinus is as much an Aristotelian as a Platonist, and Augustine follows him in placing Plato's ideas within Mind, and in conceiving knowing through the interior production of a word.⁴⁶ Aquinas knows Plato almost entirely indirectly – first by way of Aristotle and Augustine – and what he understands as Platonism, though sophisticated and wide-ranging, is Middle and Neoplatonism.⁴⁷ When it comes to the spiritual hierarchy, the treatise on the divine names, and very much else, Aquinas is in the tradition

⁴³ My “Between and Beyond Augustine and Descartes: More than a Source of the Self,” *Augustinian Studies* 32, 1 (2001), 65–88, “Self-knowledge and God as Other in Augustine: Problems for a Postmodern Retrieval,” *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch für Antike und Mittelalter* 4 (1999), 83–123, and “Knowing as we are Known” provide references to the texts and literature relevant to these assertions.

⁴⁴ This is the argument of my *God in Himself*.

⁴⁵ See Hans Feichtinger, “Oudeneia and *humilitas*: Iamblichus and Augustine on Grace and Mediation,” *Dionysius* 21 (2003), 123–60.

⁴⁶ On which see Claude Panaccio, *Le Discours intérieure de Platon à Guillaume d'Ockham* (Paris, 1999), 94–119.

⁴⁷ See W. J. Hankey, “Aquinas and the Platonists,” in Gersh and Hoener, *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages*, 279–324.

of Proclus mediated through the *Liber de causis* and Dionysius. Crucially for our purposes, in virtue of the quasi-Apostolic authority of Dionysius, Thomas is able to place his Aristotelian turn to the sensible within a Christian ascent to God (*ST* 1.1.9). On this and other matters, including the doctrine of God, Aquinas associates Aristotle and Dionysius from the beginning to the end of his writing, although how he does so changes in ways determined by his ever-growing knowledge of the history of philosophy.⁴⁸

Altering the beginning and end of our story, also alters its middle. The influence of later Neoplatonism on Boethius, the enormous role of Dionysius, and even positive contributions by Eriugena come to be seen as necessary to understanding Aquinas – as does the assimilation of the Peripatetic and Neoplatonic traditions toward one another in the forms under which they are mediated to Thomas.⁴⁹

The general principles of Neoplatonic reform or conversion of the soul towards deformity are that the cause is in the effect, and the effect in the cause. The twofold discipline by which Plotinus would have us come to the knowledge of our origin and dignity depends on this. For him, as also for Augustine, we discover this connection and ascend the ladder toward union by turning away from the sensible, because with Augustine the soul is a mutable creature and with Plotinus the soul is the lowest level of divinity, for each of them the movement is both inward and upward to greater likeness to God by self-knowledge.⁵⁰ Crucially, the alternative Proclean–Dionysian–Aristotelian anthropology, within which we locate Thomas, will still come to deformity by discovering God within, but must first turn outward.⁵¹

⁴⁸ For very significant associations from near the end of his writing, see Aquinas, *Super Librum De Causis Expositio*, ed. H.-D. Saffrey, *Textus Philosophici Friburgenses 4/5* (Fribourg–Louvain, 1954) prop. 3, 25, l. 21–4; prop. 5, 38, l. 14–20; prop. 10, 67, l. 19–68, l. 28; prop. 13, 83, l. 8–17; prop. 18, 103, l. 16–23. I treat this question at some length in “Aquinas and the Platonists” and in “Thomas’ Neoplatonic Histories.”

⁴⁹ See 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*, ed. A. Ph. Segonds and C. Steel, *Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, De Wulf–Mansion Centre, Series 1, XXVI (Leuven/Paris, 2000), 553–70; É.-H. Wéber, *Dialogue et dissensions entre saint Bonaventure et saint Thomas d’Aquin à Paris (1252–1273)*, *Bibliothèque thomiste* 41 (Paris 1974) 460–84; Hankey, *God in Himself*, 33–4 and 55, n. 74 and “*Secundum rei vim*,” 128; E. C. Sweeney, “Three Notions of *resolutio* and the Structure of Reasoning in Aquinas,” *The Thomist* 58, 2 (1994), 203–4, 215–28; de Libera, *La querelle*, 68–124.

⁵⁰ Phillip Cary’s opposition between Augustine and Plotinus on this twofold movement in *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self*, 35–44 is false.

⁵¹ Best on the Proclean–Dionysian–Aristotelian connection is E. Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology in Islamic and Christian Thinkers*, *Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought III*, 20 (Cambridge, 1983).

Because only the simple has immediate self-knowledge, Proclus, following Iamblichus, does not regard soul as having direct knowledge of its own essence:

the 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.⁵²

This is a gradual temporal process, which involves making present to the soul what is in it owing to its derivation from *Nous*. From the time of the efforts of Syrianus to bring concord between Plato and Aristotle on this point, among the Neoplatonists this process is a reconciliation of Aristotelian abstraction and Platonic reminiscence. Put crudely, abstraction from the sensible is the means by which the soul comes to remember the *logoi* it contains. The ideas in *Nous* may be spoken of as illumining the *logoi* immanent in the soul so that we know by them. Among the Arab Peripatetics this structure and language are used in respect to how human knowing stands to the Agent Intellect.⁵³ This unification of abstraction and innatism, of making and contemplation, of reasoning and illumination sets us on the path to a self-knowledge leading to the highest union that religion seeks. J. J. O’Cleary writes of how, for Proclus, the soul has knowledge of itself and the One:

Proclus cites Socrates in the (First) *Alcibiades* as saying that the soul, by entering into herself, will behold all things including the deity itself ... At first the soul beholds only herself but when she penetrates more profoundly into the knowledge of herself she finds in herself both intellect and the orders of beings. However, when she proceeds ... into the “sanctuary” .. of the soul, she perceives with her eyes closed the genus of the gods and the unities of beings.⁵⁴

The gods and “the unities of beings” to which he refers are above knowledge in themselves; the soul knows them only as they are in soul. The kind of knowing proper to soul is *dianoia*, the discursive logic of science.⁵⁵ *Logismos*, or ratiocination, will not apprehend the god within. Crucially, however, “the genus of the gods and the unities of beings” cannot be apprehended without

⁵²D. G. MacIsaac, “Projection and Time in Proclus,” in Inglis, *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism and Christianity*, 83–105, at 96; see also 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, 1.XXIV (Leuven and Paris, 1997), 293–309.

⁵³See de Libera, *La querelle*, 103–9.

⁵⁴J. J. O’Cleary, “The Role of Mathematics in Proclus’ Theology,” in Segonds and Steel, *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne*, 65–90, at 75–6. For a much mediated doctrine from the *Alcibiades* known to Aquinas, see de Libera, *L’Unité de l’intellect*, 264, n. 256.

⁵⁵MacIsaac, “Projection and Time in Proclus,” 99–101.

these modes of knowing. Active according to these modes, the soul awakens and discovers what is hidden in its potency by making the *logoi* come to be out of itself. In this way, Proclus has brought the Aristotelian teaching that the ideas belong to, and come forth from thinking – a doctrine embraced by Plotinus and Augustine – into the operations of the soul, and he made this projection, or self-creativity, essential for its rise to contemplation and union. In consequence, the hierarchy of the sciences is an anagogy. Proclus is the greatest systematizer of the sciences for the sake of the self-knowledge leading to the knowledge of God, creating a ladder of spiritual ascent which endured until, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was deconstructed for the sake of what we call modern science.⁵⁶

Science, including metaphysics, is spiritual ascent, but it is also only a preparation. In his *Commentary on the First Alcibiades*, Proclus lists the conditions of self-knowledge. Philosophy is given a role comparable to that of purifications, rites of ablution, and expiation in the Mysteries, so that “philosophy constitutes a preliminary purification and a preparation for self-knowledge and the immediate contemplation of our own essence.”⁵⁷ This subordination is important, because by making philosophy an *ancilla* not just of metaphysics as wisdom, but also of what the gods graciously reveal, something like Thomas’ thirteenth-century developments are anticipated. Proclus is clear that we can only wait for what exceeds knowledge. I quote O’Cleary again:

Like the initiate of the mystery cults, one must wait in the outer darkness for the gods to illuminate the soul, so as to bring it into direct contact with the One. This is why prayer and theurgy are necessary supplements to the scientific way, according to Proclus.⁵⁸

There is a comparable transcendence of reason’s work in order to arrive at contemplative union in Plotinus. His last description of illumination by the

⁵⁶ For a brief outline of the hierarchy, see Proclus, *A Commentary on the First Book of Euclid’s Elements*, trans. G. R. Morrow (Princeton, 1970), Book 1, ch. 1, 3–4 and A. Charles-Saget, *L’Architecture du Divin: Mathématique et philosophie chez Plotin et Proclus* (Paris, 1982), 191–205. For the structure of reasoning, see D. G. MacIsaac, “The Soul and Discursive Reason in the Philosophy of Proclus” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, Ind., 2001). For a treatment of part of the history with a note about Thomas’ place in it, see I. G. Stewart, “Mathematics as Philosophy: Barrow and Proclus,” *Dionysius* 18 (2000), 151–82.

⁵⁷ Proclus, *Sur le Premier Alcibiade de Platon*, ed. and trans. A. Ph. Segonds, vol. 1 (Paris, 1985) prooemium 9, p. 7, ll. 1–7.

⁵⁸ O’Cleary, “The Role,” 88. J. Bussanich, “Mystical Theology and Spiritual Experience in Proclus’ *Platonic Theology*,” in Segonds and Steel, *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne*, 291–310, at 306 refuses to isolate “ecstatic states and visionary experiences” from “the entire way of life pursued by the Neoplatonic mystic.”

One is denuded of any rational self-elevation. He speaks of belief in a way that may have inspired Proclus' teaching on faith⁵⁹ – it, significantly, is our faculty for union beyond knowledge – when describing the “sudden reception of a light” which compels the soul “to believe” that “it is from Him, it is Him.” There is a breaking in; the illumination “comes.” With this arrival of the “true end of the soul,” it “contemplates the light by which it sees.”⁶⁰

To indicate what this discussion of Proclus and Plotinus has to do with Aquinas, I shall not give the elaborate answer scholarship would now enable about what Thomas knew of their positions.⁶¹ Rather I point to historical considerations which indicate how what is fundamental here comes to Aquinas. The first is a well-known aspect of Aquinas' position, recently reexamined by Kevin Corrigan in order to connect it with the Iamblichan–Proclean understanding of how the soul comes to self-knowledge, namely, that, for Aquinas, the soul does not know its own essence directly. Corrigan puts Thomas' doctrine this way:

The immediate self-reflection of incorporeal beings is the essence of self-knowledge . . . 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.⁶²

The next pieces in making the connection are studies by Alain de Libera, on the one hand, and Claude Lafleur on the other. The first considers the movement “Du néoplatonisme grec au péripatétisme arabe”⁶³ and shows how in Late Antiquity a spiritual ladder of the soul's ascent from the work of abstraction to the contemplation of separate substances as its bliss comes to be constructed. De Libera goes on to consider in what ways this spiritual ladder is transformed by al-Fârâbî into the hierarchy of abstractions and separations through which the sciences are constituted. Claude Lafleur makes evident that this doctrine became general in the Faculty of Arts at Paris in the

⁵⁹ Ph. Hoffmann, “La triade Chaldaïque ἕρος, ἀλήθεια, πίστις de Proclus à Simplicius,” in Segonds and Steel *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne*, 459–89, at 469; see Ham's comments in Plotin, *Traité 49 (V.3)*, intro., trans., commentary and notes Bertrand Ham, *Les Écrits de Plotin* (Paris, 2000), 274.

⁶⁰ *Ennead* 5.3.17; Plotin, *Traité 49*, p. 17, ll. 29–38.

⁶¹ For this see Hankey, “Aquinas and the Platonists.”

⁶² K. Corrigan, “L'auto-réflexivité et l'expérience humaine dans l'*Ennéade* V, 3 [49], et autres traités: de Plotin à Thomas d'Aquin,” *Études sur Plotin*, ed. M. Fattal (Paris–Montreal, 2000), 149–72, at 157. For the argument, see Hankey, “Between and Beyond Augustine,” 84–5.

⁶³ De Libera, *La querelle*, 67–124.

thirteenth century, and that the doctrine derived from al-Fârâbî, and common in the Faculty, is taken over by Aquinas.⁶⁴

Finally, Houston Smit makes evident how for Aquinas the abstraction by which humans understand is an act of mental creation so that what the soul contains becomes known to itself. He demonstrates that the “conceptual empiricism” attributed to Aquinas in the old story by scholars like Étienne Gilson is false. In showing “that the forms which the agent intellect impresses on the possible [intellect] . . . do not inhere in the senses at all, and that the agent intellect must in abstracting . . . produce a content not present in any sensible cognition,”⁶⁵ Smit wishes to reconcile Aquinas with Augustine’s innatism and doctrine of illumination. This is a proper correction of the old story. When to Smit’s account we add the developments outlined above within Neoplatonic and Peripatetic traditions which unified them, the context is supplied enabling Thomas’ reconciliation of Aristotle’s abstractionism and Augustine’s Platonism.

Smit asks us to attend to Thomas’ “identification of the agent intellect with the ‘connatural light of our souls’ (*SCG* II 77 [5]).” For Aquinas, “this light . . . is ‘nothing more than a participating likeness in the uncreated light, in which all the divine ideas are contained’ (*ST* Ia 84.6).”⁶⁶ Smit begins with an account of Thomas’ views on the limitations of sensory cognition. Continuing on this Platonic road, he goes on to the “Hierarchy of the Spiritual Light and the Nature of the Intellect,” which in effect gives us Thomas’ version of the Neoplatonic hierarchy of being as a graduated series of participated intellectual acts. This helps, he says:

to clarify how, by identifying the agent intellect with the human share in spiritual light, and spiritual light generally with the actuality of *intelligere*, Thomas combines an Augustinian theory of internal illumination and an Aristotelian conceptual empiricism within his metaphysics of act and potency.⁶⁷

The creation of abstracted universals in the soul is a participation in the divine self-knowledge insofar as the power which makes this divine-human act possible is an uncreated light which we possess in a created participation. “[T]he agent intellect can make sensible forms actually intelligible only in

⁶⁴ See C. Lafleur, “Abstraction, séparation et tripartition de la philosophie théorique: Quelques éléments de l’arrière-fond farabien et arrien de Thomas d’Aquin, *Super Boetium* <<*De Trinitate*>>, question 5, article 3,” *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales* 67, 2 (2000), 249–69; and “Abstraction, séparation et objet de la métaphysique,” *Actes du XXVII^e Congrès de l’Association des Sociétés de Philosophie de Langue Française. La métaphysique: son histoire, sa critique, ses enjeux*, ed. L. Langlois and J-M. Narbonne, Collection Zétésis (Paris–Québec, 2000), 217–23.

⁶⁵ Smit, “Aquinas’s Abstractionism,” 87 and n. 6.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

virtue of its containing virtually, as a participating likeness in the divine light, cognition of the divine being” in the soul’s knowledge of the transcendentals.⁶⁸ Professor Smit concludes:

the intelligible forms that come to inform our intellects ... are ... 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 virtually and universally, in partial active potency. ... [the intellect] requires phantasms not because they already contain what we represent abstractly in concepts, but because ... phantasms provide enough information to render distinct the content which pre-exists in its light in a “general and confused way.”⁶⁹

Crucially, in virtue of the changes Aquinas made with respect to both the Augustinians and the Arabs (who are remarkably close on this issue⁷⁰), arriving at self-knowledge and rising toward the knowledge of God by which we become deiform are simultaneous in us.

Because, for Aquinas, when abstracting the forms of sensible things, we make the greatest and most common universals emerge in our minds, we strengthen the power by which we can approximate the knowledge of separate divine intellect. 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 – every individual human soul is stamped with this divine power by God himself – what we know in and by the divine light is ourselves. By this long and complex route St. Thomas comes back to that identification of self-knowledge and the knowledge of God which Plato set out in the *Alcibiades*,⁷¹ a dialogue Iamblichus set at the beginning of curriculum for those entering the Platonic school.

IV. Some Consequences and a Conclusion

This updated version of the old story breaks down its polar oppositions. Something very significant does happen insofar as Latin Christianity embraces Aristotle, the university, an independence for philosophy vis-à-vis sacred doctrine, the descent of the soul into the sensible, and the cosmological ascent up the ladder of the sciences as included in the way to deiformity. Nonetheless, through placing both saints within the history of Neoplatonism and Arabic Peripateticism, Aquinas is drawn back toward Augustine. This

⁶⁸ Ibid., 105 and 112–13.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 118.

⁷⁰ See Richard C. Dales, *The Problem of the Rational Soul in the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden–New York, 1995).

⁷¹ See David M. Johnson, “God as the True Self: Plato’s *Alcibiades I*,” *Ancient Philosophy* 19 (1999), 1–19.

comes into view in a recent essay by Dominic O'Meara with the significant title "La science métaphysique (ou théologie) de Proclus comme exercice spirituel." This is a consideration of Proclus' *Elements of Theology* which O'Meara shows to be the equivalent in Proclus of the metaphysics of Aristotle, and also to be a rigorously demonstrative science functioning as an "entraînement anagogique" of the rational soul, preparing it for access to *Nous*.⁷² The soul comes to self-knowledge because it is discovering *Nous* within herself. O'Meara concludes with some suggestions about the historical consequences of the Neoplatonic conception of "metaphysics as anagogic conceptual introspection" and mentions Augustine, Boethius, the *Proslogion* of Anselm, and Descartes as belonging to the tradition.⁷³ We can now extend this list. Both Bonaventure's *Itinerarium* and Thomas' *Super Boetium De Trinitate* teach that we climb the spiritual *itinerarium* by the steps which order the complex of the sciences. These two theologians draw together Augustine with the Pseudo-Dionysius, who religiously enables, and philosophically requires, their acceptance of the Aristotelian sciences as media of the self-knowledge leading us to God. Eriugena was the first Latin to think with Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius at once. It begins to appear that, to a remarkable degree, the scholastics of the thirteenth century are more his successors than they are his opponents.

Before considering what this history tells us about ecclesiastical reform, let me remind you that reform has meant at least two things in this essay. First, I have spoken as if Western Christendom were a growing and developing organism which was required to cope with changes in its environment. In this context reform appears as a life-preserving and enhancing self-transformation which depends upon and enables drawing the other within the living being. To speak in terms of Anselm's predominant logic, the *aliud* is drawn within the *per se*.⁷⁴ Second, reform is what I take to be the essence of Christianity as a Hellenic and Hellenistic religion, namely, the conversion toward personal deformity by self-knowledge.

The old story was told as it was because we lacked, or refused to see, features of the history which would have enabled us to tell it otherwise. More interestingly, we loved telling it as we did because it seemed to provide a way of embracing a reform which displayed innovation in medieval Christianity, but crucially, innovation which arrived at the always-true *philosophia perennis*. The pattern of medieval thought thus became an ideal for our own age. Its self-transformation could be represented as one which allowed

⁷²D. J. O'Meara, "La science métaphysique (ou théologie) de Proclus comme exercice spirituel," in Segonds and Steel, *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne*, 279–90, at 289.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 290.

⁷⁴See Hankey, "Secundum rei vim," 134–41.

Catholics both to engage modernity and also to fight the modern, constructed, by those who told the story, as the polar opposite of the Thomistic summit of the High Middle Ages – a summit which once achieved it had always to regain. The revised story cannot be told in this way. The new footnotes make evident that the Hellenistic turn to the subject, and the Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neoplatonic conversion to deiformity by self-knowledge govern the millennium between Augustine and Aquinas, uniting its poles. These two saints cannot be set against each other for the sake of a war against modernity understood as a turn to the subject.⁷⁵ The logic by which modern and premodern are connected had the paradoxical and ironic result that in waging the anti-modern war Thomism was transformed into a species of modernist rationalism.⁷⁶

Further, in retelling the old story we have come upon the positive, as well as the critical, relation of Aquinas to the development of philosophy among the Arabic Peripatetics. When he encompassed this assertion of a total scientific reason by engaging and correcting philosophy in the Faculty of Arts and within his own writings, he contributed to the establishment of an independent and laïc intellectual life in the Middle Ages. The modern university, and much else characteristic of modernity, have their roots here. If Aquinas cannot be set against Augustine because, within the Neoplatonic traditions, they have the turn to the subject in common, neither can we set Thomas against the Augustine who underlies the autonomy of philosophy in Descartes.⁷⁷

Finally, it is worth noting that, at least in this case, the ecclesiastical authorities opposed genuinely significant innovation in the short term. To a considerable degree, they identified themselves with a reactionary party. In the longer term, the authorities lost control over Christendom's self-transformation, and had little choice except to embrace the innovations. During two other periods of ecclesiastical fright – the Counter-Reformation, and the reaction of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Church against modernity – attempts were made to represent what Aquinas accomplished so

⁷⁵ See W. J. Hankey, "The Postmodern Retrieval of Neoplatonism in Jean-Luc Marion and John Milbank and the Origins of Western Subjectivity in Augustine and Eriugena," *Hermathena* 165 (Winter 1998), 9–70, at 67–70, "Self-knowledge and God as Other," 122–3, and "Denys and Aquinas," 172–3.

⁷⁶ The irony of anti-modern neo-Neoscholasticism has now been pointed out by many; I note Rosemann, "A Change of Paradigm"; E. Tourpe, "Thomas et la modernité. Un point de vue spéculatif sur l'histoire de la métaphysique thomiste," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 85, 3 (July, 2001), 433–60; and Kerr, *After Aquinas*, esp. 17–51.

⁷⁷ See S. Menn, *Descartes and Augustine* (Cambridge, 1998); Z. Janowski, *Index Augustino-Cartésien: Textes et Commentaire*, Histoire de la philosophie (Paris, 2000); and Hankey, "Between and Beyond Augustine."

as to domesticate and use it. The second of these was only effective in the short term. Moreover, evaluated in light of the reaction of the Second Vatican Council and its consequences, the imposition of neo-Neoscholasticism turned out to be extremely costly, necessitating sudden and confusing reversals.⁷⁸ In the end, fundamental intellectual and spiritual reform happens independently of, or in opposition to, attempts to control it. Reactionary interventions are more disruptive and destructive than effective.

It is hard to know what practical lessons we can draw from these observations. It is unlikely they will have any effect on the authorities, and no one who studies Scholasticism can in conscience recommend that the bishops should listen to endlessly squabbling academics. However, the millennial-long reform we have reexamined seems to me to show both how conservatively determined the fundamental psychic structures of Western Christendom are and also how successfully they have been transformed to include their own alterities. Whether the Holy Spirit will renew our minds in still more radical ways, we cannot know in advance. The strength the western psyche acquired in the self-transformation we have traced enabled it to bring both modern and postmodern forms of itself to birth. Such strength may also bring about its own gigantic self-overcoming.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ For remarks, see my “Making Theology Practical: Thomas Aquinas and the Nineteenth Century Religious Revival,” *Dionysius* 9 (1985), 85–127 and “Practical Considerations about Teaching Philosophy and Theology Now,” *Restoring Faith In Reason, A New Translation of the Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II together with a commentary and discussion*, ed. Laurence Paul Hemming and Susan Frank Parsons (London, 2002), 199–205. The Jesuits were crucial to both the Counter-Reformation and the Leonine Thomisms; on the latter, see J. Inglis, *Spheres of Philosophical Inquiry and the Historiography of Mediaeval Philosophy*, Brill’s Studies in Intellectual History, 81 (Leiden–Boston–Köln, 1998).

⁷⁹ See W. J. Hankey, “Dionysian Hierarchy in St. Thomas Aquinas: Tradition and Transformation,” *Denys l’Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident, Actes du Colloque International Paris, 21–24 septembre 1994*, ed. Ysabel de Andia, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 151 (Paris, 1997), 405–38, at 437–8.