

The Given and the Thought

Reflections on faith and reason, or their analogues,
in Robert Crouse, Augustine and the Platonic Tradition, Aquinas and Aristotle¹
Concluding Seminar for Medieval Interpreters of Aristotle, 2012-13: Thomas
Aquinas
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I offer this discussion, grounded in Robert Crouse's treatment of faith and reason generally, and especially his treatments of this relation in Augustine and the Platonic Tradition,² Aquinas and Aristotle, together with some of my own work on the character of the agent intellect in Aquinas, as the conclusion of my seminar for 2012-13. It undertook a rereading of the first forty-five questions of *Summa theologiae*,³ using my book on the subject and scholarship subsequent to its publication, much of it by me. We considered the rise to the simplicity of the first principle (1.3)⁴ from the perception of motion (1.2.3), and the subsequent emanation to and return out ever more greatly divided multiplicities by way of a series of circular logics: 1) the movement of the divine essence upon itself in the first moment of the *de deo uno* (1.3-1.11). In its second moment, we considered 2) the divine operations of knowing, loving, and power which return to their *principium*, the divine essence, by way of the knowledge happiness human and divine requires (1.13-1.26). Moving outward to the *de deo trino*, we considered 3) the formation of three infinite divine subsistences by the natural and necessary processions of the internal operations in the form of the opposed relations of knower and known, lover and beloved, and return from the attributes of the essence which disclose these subsistences back to the essence (the "emanation" and circumcession of the Trinity, 1.27-1.43). 4) Finally we considered multiple subsistences again formed by the relation to, as distinguished from a relation in, the essence, that is, the creation of multiple varied subsistences as together a similitude of the divine essence under the opposed relation of given and accepted power outside the divinity (the "emanation" of Creation 1.44-1.45); the completion of the circle back to the source from creatures ultimately takes the remainder of the three parts of the *Summa*.

¹ These reflections have been provoked and assisted by the seminars delivered to the Department of Classics, Dalhousie University, by Dr Dimitri Gutas and Dr David Bronstein in the Winter Term of 2013.

² References will be to the outline of his academic publications in my "*Memoria, Intellectus, Voluntas: the Augustinian Centre of Robert Crouse's Scholarly Work*," a paper for an Academic Celebration of Professor Robert Darwin Crouse, Dalhousie Department of Classics, October 14th and 15th 2011, forthcoming in *Dionysius* 30 (2012), 41-76. I shall use the pagination of the *Dionysius* article.

³ *God in Himself; Aquinas' Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae*, Oxford Theological Monographs / Oxford Scholarly Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987 / 2000).

⁴ References in this form are to the *Summa theologiae* of Aquinas.

This logic requires that “the method, necessity, and accomplishment of questions 2 to 45 of the *Summa theologiae* is to understand God from the perspective of creatures and creatures from the perspective of God.” Seeing how this is and can be so involves the relation of faith, or gracious revelation, and the light of reason, or philosophy. Faith provides the perspective from above and philosophy the perspective from below. However, following Crouse, it is crucial that these are not relations between revealed religion and philosophy (or not primarily these relations), but matters of the structure and possibility of the philosophical sciences, including theology, themselves. Thus they become generally the question of the relation of givenness and reflexivity, or, in the Aristotelian tradition (and its Neoplatonic extensions), the question of abstraction and the agency by which it is enabled.

I propose in this paper to present you with some texts the discussion of which will, I hope, advance our reflection on these most difficult matters.

1. Robert treated these questions from the beginning of his academic publishing and there is scarcely one of his papers which is not relevant to them. A first publication (1956) was for *A Scholastic Miscellany* edited by Eugene Fairweather. In it Robert translated and annotated an excerpt from the *Disputed Questions on Faith* by a 13th-century Master General of the Franciscans, Matthew of Aquasparta, as to whether objects of faith can also be proved by reason. In a note he explains the complementarity of nature and grace in a way which he ascribes to both Matthew and Aquinas, despite important differences of mode. The principles of this complementarity will be Robert’s own throughout his teaching:

Man’s intellectual operations, as image (*imago*) [of God], are dependent upon divine illumination, but such operations must not be described as supernatural or miraculous....They are natural in the sense that the very nature (*ratio*) of the image requires that it receive divine illumination to perform its *proper* function: this is in accord with the nature of the creature. (Cf. the position of Aquinas: “Because man’s nature is dependent upon a higher nature, natural knowledge is not sufficient for its perfection, and some supernatural knowledge is necessary”.)⁵

This might seem to be a peculiarity of the Augustinian doctrine of grace, which, on the matter had recently been clarified by the researches of Henri de Lubac exposing that neither Augustine nor Aquinas held a doctrine of “pure nature”.⁶ We must prescind from the natural - supernatural distinction which philosophy will not develop until Iamblichus (250-330), just before St Basil of Caesarea (330-379), who

⁵ Robert D. Crouse, “Matthew of Aquasparta, *Disputed Questions on Faith*,” in Fairweather, *A Scholastic Miscellany*, 402–427 at note 106, p. 426.

⁶ See Wayne Hankey, *One Hundred Years of Neoplatonism in France: A Brief Philosophical History*, by Wayne Hankey (pages 97–248), *Studies in Philosophical Theology* (Leuven/Paris/Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2006), 142–151.

was born in the year Iamblichus died, gave us μεταφυσικ as part of the same distinguishing between what is natural and what is beyond it taking place in this period.⁷ These ways of looking at the structure of reality must not determine our view of Aquinas or of Aristotle.

Aquinas understands Aristotle to maintain that our knowledge of God is a certain participation in the divine self-knowing. Although Aquinas' teaching about how we know intellectual substances is not identical with that of Aristotle,⁸ this doctrine Aquinas correctly finds in the *Metaphysics* as well as in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and he takes it to be the condition of metaphysics as knowledge of divinity.⁹ Two points are essential here. First and foremost, for neither Aristotle nor Aquinas is human thinking its only or its highest form, and our thinking, both absolutely and of higher forms, is dependent on the higher form or forms (it is a "participation" in intellect, *nous*, which is not properly ours). No full consideration of the principles of human knowing in Aristotle can succeed without clarity on this point.

Second, for Aquinas, participation in the divine knowing is required both for the *lumen naturalis rationis* and the *lumen divinae revelationis*, and this is so in their separation. For Aquinas, following Aristotle mediated by Moses Maimonides, five reasons exhibit the weakness of the investigations of human reason and show why we need another source of knowing than philosophy (1.1.1), but, to repeat, it is altogether essential that the human participation in God's knowing is not only by way of scriptural revelation, rather "this natural light of reason is a certain participation of the divine light."¹⁰

When, fifty years later (2007), dealing with the relation of Descartes to Augustine, and of each of them to modernity, Robert reverted to Matthew of Aquasparta and reiterates his position, making it in opposition to James Doull's assertion that "the genius of Descartes...is that he begins to give the Augustinian philosophy a properly philosophical form; that is, to show it in its independence from the religious form which it has in Augustine."¹¹ This time Crouse writes again of Aquinas and relates the need of the human mind for its two-fold but diverse participations in the divine thinking to the relation between the sciences:

⁷ See Hans Feichtinger, "Oudeneia and humilitas: Nature and Function of Humility in Iamblichus and Augustine." *Dionysius* 21 (2003): 123-160 and Basil of Caesarea, *Commentaire sur Isaïe V.162*, quoted in Brisson's Annexe 1, pp. 55-57 and L. Brisson, "Un si long Anonymat", *La métaphysique: son histoire, sa critique, ses jeux*, ed. J.-M. Narbonne and L. Langlois (Paris: Vrin, 1999), 35-60 and Wayne Hankey, "Natural Theology in the Patristic Period," Chapter Three of the *Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology*, edited by Russell Re Manning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁸ See Endnote 3, *God in Himself*, 165.

⁹ See Aquinas, *In Metaphysicorum* 1.3, pp. 18-20 §§ 60-68; idem, *In librum Beati Dionysii de divinis nominibus expositio*. ed. C. Pera (Turin/ Rome: Marietti, 1950), 1.1, pp. 7-11, §§ 17-39; idem, *Sententia Libri Ethicorum*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Commissio Leonina: vol. 47, pars 1 and 2 (Rome 1969) ii, 10.11, 587-88, lines 60-164.

¹⁰ *ST* 1.12.11 ad 3: *ipsum lumen naturale rationis participatio quaedam est divini luminis*.

¹¹ Robert D. Crouse, "St Augustine and Descartes as Fathers of Modernity," ms § 10.

But is this really a remaking of the Augustinian philosophy? Does it not rather depend upon a rejection of the fundamental principles of the Augustinian position, which would indicate precisely the folly of such independent reason, and insist upon the beginning in faith: “for the eye of man’s mind does not focus in so excellent a light, unless strengthened by the justice of faith”. Would not the rational independence of the Cartesian position depend upon the distinctions between philosophy and theology advanced first by St. Thomas Aquinas, and vigorously opposed by such Augustinians as Bonaventure and Matthew of Aquasparta? Does not the Cartesian autonomy of philosophy depend upon the radical separation of philosophical and theological sciences, between physics and metaphysics, which are the Scotist response to the Averroist crisis of the thirteenth century? Is not the inward isolation of Descartes more that of some late medieval mystics than the interiority of St. Augustine?¹²

2. Robert’s interconnection of the structures of revelation with those of reason comes out repeatedly in his insistence on the ways in which the pagan, Jewish, and Christian, and the Hellenic and Hebrew, blend and the ways in which they complement each other, and his refusal of the extremely dangerous Semitic – Hellenic paradigms and oppositions. He takes this path from the beginning with his work on *justitia* in Anselm (1958) but it continues with the essay on the Hellenization of Christianity (1962) and concludes with his beautiful analysis of the *Liber Sapientiae* (2004). Underlying this is work on the Septuagint, Philo Judaeus, and the *Wisdom of Solomon* with their massive and determinative influences on Patristic and mediaeval Christianity. However, we must relegate this to the sidelines and return to the question of the relation of the Aristotelian sciences.

Although the centre of this consideration takes him forward from Philo to Aquinas and Albert and backward to Aristotle himself, it is important that Robert began again with Augustine and his assimilation to the Greek Fathers under the auspices of the Neoplatonic structures of Eriugena’s thought. There, “the authority of the Sacred Books and the reason of philosophy stand in no ultimate opposition, having a common source in the Divine *Logos*, who enlightens every man; they have also a common end and common good in the intellectual vision of God.”¹³ His question is as to the source and meaning of the formula “*philosophia ancilla theologiae*”, for which the *locus classicus* is Philo, in Aquinas and Albert. They get it from Aristotle, and, thus, crucially for them, the relation between philosophical science and Biblical wisdom is modelled on and derived from the relations between the subordinate sciences and theology in Aristotle. By this route we return to the participation in divine *intellectus* on which human reasoning depends.

¹² *Ibid.*, ms § 11.

¹³ Robert D. Crouse, “Honorius Augustodunensis: The Arts as *via ad patriam*,” in Congrès international de philosophie médiévale, *Arts Liberaux et philosophie au moyen âge* (Montréal: Institut d’études médiévale/ Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1969), 531–539 at 538.

Thomas and Albert get it directly and explicitly from the source. Aristotle's use of it thus remains important:

[H]e observes that the science of the end, or of the good must be principal, and that the other sciences, as “handmaids” (δούλας) may not contradict it but must serve and obey. This highest science, or wisdom, is theology—the divine science, θεία τῶν ἐπιστημῶν, which appropriately belongs to God alone, or at least to God principally.¹⁴

Robert found it “important to emphasize”, not only for the sake of getting the history right, but because it expressed his own conviction, that:

[F]or St. Thomas and St. Albert...the primary reference of the concept...[is]the relationship which obtains between the particular philosophical sciences and theology, whether theology takes the form of metaphysics, or the form which it has in sacred doctrine, deriving its principles from revelation. *Theologia* for these doctors, though double in form, is radically one; for it is in the first place that wisdom according to which God knows himself, and in that self-knowing knows all things. But, since, as Aristotle remarks, “the divine power cannot be jealous”, we are given to share in that divine science, not indeed as our possession, but *sicut aliquid ab eo mutuatum*.¹⁵

Robert's conclusion gave a common structure to the relation of the given and the reasoned in the philosophies within the Hellenic tradition.

In the meeting, conflict, and mutual enrichment of cultures which characterized much of the history of Medieval thought and institutions, perhaps no question was more important for philosophy than that of defining its own role, that of scientific reason, in relation to traditions of divinely revealed, prophetic, knowledge. Inevitable difficulty lay in the fact that philosophy, in its Aristotelian form, presented itself as “divine science”, and could hardly confine itself to the limited scope of refining exegetical techniques in the interpretation of sacred scriptures. At its highest, metaphysical, level, it constituted a theology, rationally demonstrated, which might be compared with the sacred doctrine authoritatively delivered in the scriptures of the several religions. The relationship between these theologies, variously worked out by philosophers in each of the religious traditions, often in significant cultural interdependence,

¹⁴ Robert D. Crouse, ‘St. Thomas, St. Albert, Aristotle: *Philosophia Ancilla Theologiae*’, *Atti del Congresso Internazionale Tommaso nel suo settimo centenario*, i (Naples: Edizioni Domenicane Italiane, 1975), 181–185 at 182.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.

was, and continues to be, of the utmost importance for the religious and intellectual life of those communities.¹⁶

3. Identifying the fundamental structure of philosophy as one of reception or givenness, on the one hand, and complete explication or reflection, on the other, is Robert's great and characteristic contribution to the question of the relation of faith and reason. He writes of Boethius, both his *Consolation of Philosophy*, giving the Platonism common to Christians and pagans, and his *Theological Tractates*, concerning the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation. They both proceed from faith:

Just as the argument of the *Consolatio* begins from true opinion (*vera sententia*) and proceeds from that *minima scintillula* to understanding, so the arguments of the *Tractates* move from the correct (i.e. "universal") beliefs to logical explication.¹⁷

Thus, in his *fides quaerens intellectum*, as in that of Eriugena and the other early scholastics, "faith is the preliminary form of a knowledge which the philosopher attempts to establish by necessary reasons."¹⁸ The method of Boethius is "the logical explication of received (i.e. universal) beliefs, and the explication is itself the demonstration, conjoining faith and reason."¹⁹ In his last academic writings Robert will continue to argue that this conjuncture of faith and reason is not only genuinely a form of philosophy, but indeed is necessary to philosophy. He will maintain this in opposition to James Doull. Thus Robert wrote:

in the ancient world theology was not a peculiarly Christian enterprise..., all philosophy was in the end theology, inasmuch as it sought an understanding of that first principle of thought and being which might be referred to variously as the Good, or the One, or *ho theos*; and the other philosophical sciences were as handmaids to the highest science, or wisdom, in which they would seek their unity, coherence and certainty. [The philosophical] itinerary was the movement from belief, through the discursive reason of *scientia*, to the unified intellectual grasp of principle in *sapientia*.²⁰

This is easily identified by him as the Augustinian and the Platonic pattern.

¹⁶ Robert D. Crouse, "Philosophia Ancilla Theologiae: Some texts from Aristotle's *Metaphysica* in the Interpretation of Albertus Magnus," *Actas del V Congreso Internacional de Filosofia Medieval*, 2 vols (Madrid: Editora Nacional, 1979) i, 657–661 at 657.

¹⁷ Robert D. Crouse, *Semina Rationum: St. Augustine and Boethius*, *Dionysius* 4 (1980): 75–85 at 81.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Robert D. Crouse, "St. Augustine's *De Trinitate*: Philosophical Method", *Studia Patristica*, XVI,2 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag: 1985), 501–51 at 503.

Certainly, [he writes,] in terms of a much later definition of philosophy [the one James laid down] which would see it as independent of faith and divine revelation, there is no Patristic philosophy. But for St Augustine, true philosophy (*nostra philosophia*) involves a continual interrelation of *fides* and *intellectus* in the ‘hermeneutic circle’: *credo ut intellegam, intellego ut credam*. The understanding finds, that faith may yet continually seek: *et inveniendum quaeritur et quaerendum invenitur*. For St Augustine, the religious form and the philosophical form are not alternative, but complementary and always interdependent.²¹

Robert adds that this complementarity of religion and philosophy was true also for the pagans. Neither the Christian Patristic, nor the mediaeval philosophic theologians, “nor, indeed, their pagan Neoplatonist contemporaries could think of a philosophy independent of divine revelation.”²² Thus,

Platonism, from Plato, and throughout its history, is never a “natural” philosophy, as distinguished from theology. It is always inevitably and emphatically theological, as it ascends the line from belief to understanding, as it interprets allegorically the oracles and dreams and visions of divinely possessed prophets, poets and philosophers: ever seeking understanding in the light of eternal reasons, ever aspiring towards a unitive knowledge of the supreme transcendent Good; ever seeking *homoiosis theou*—divine likeness. And Platonism is never without the thought of divine revelation, as opening a door to the understanding. That becomes most obvious, of course, in the later history of pagan Platonism...²³

The pattern is, however, extendable to the Aristotelians, and at least in part to Aristotle. If what Robert writes about Augustine were to be thus extended (and I am sure he thought it must), the question of the ground and structure of the self would need to be taken up. Faith and understanding belong to all complete reasoning. Robert had Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*, as well as Augustine, in mind when he wrote:

It is axiomatic that one cannot demonstrate a first principle by reference to anything prior to it; one can demonstrate it only by showing that it is necessarily presupposed by everything subsequent to it. St. Augustine’s claim is that the self-conscious life of the mind presupposed as its centre and ground the illumination of a principle of absolute self-consciousness, in which *memoria*,

²¹ Robert D. Crouse, “Commentary: The Augustinian Philosophy and Christian Institutions,” *Philosophy and Freedom: The Legacy of James Doull*, edited by David G. Peddle and Neil G. Robertson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 210–218 at 212.

²² *Ibid.*, 213.

²³ Robert D. Crouse, “‘In Aenigmate Trinitatis’ (*Confessions*, XII,5,6): The Conversion of Philosophy in St. Augustine’s *Confessions*,” *Dionysius* 11 (1987): 53–62 at 56.

intellectus and *voluntas* are perfectly united without confusion. The concept of that Trinitarian principle, declared *foris* in the revealed word, is authenticated *intus* as the mind on its inward journey discovers itself as image, presupposing that principle. And the conclusion is indubitable in the sense that a denial of the Principle would imply a denial of the actuality of the self as self-conscious *imago*. Thus, the concept of the Trinity grasped by faith is the starting-point and guide to an understanding of self-consciousness, while the understanding of self is, in turn, the continuing and ever more complete demonstration of that starting-point.²⁴

4. I propose to explore an extension to Aquinas and Aristotle of the pattern identified by Robert by way of a radically edited version of my “*Participatio divini luminis*, Aquinas’ doctrine of the Agent Intellect: Our Capacity for Contemplation.”²⁵ Its aim was to treat both the sources of Aquinas’ doctrine and the role of the agent, active, or poetic intellect of Aristotle in abstraction for Aquinas. In this rendition I shall eliminate most of the consideration of sources.

For Thomas, although all action in the universe is reduced to God as First Mover,²⁶ in that action the works of nature and of grace are mutually interconnected. Thomas’ text in the second article of Question 12 of the *Summa theologiae* is crucial. 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.²⁷

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

²⁴Crouse, “St. Augustine’s *De Trinitate*,” 510.

²⁵*Dionysius* 22 (2004): 149-78.

²⁶Aquinas, *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.*

²⁷*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.*

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.”²⁸ Our question in this paper is how this likeness is achieved (to the extent that it can be) in philosophical knowing in this present life.

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 irrational 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.”²⁹ Human 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.”³⁰ Among intellectual creatures, humans are the lowest, and thus their natural capacity is for receiving the forms of material things.³¹ 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.”³² This hierarchical schema limits the human, but, nonetheless, it is given a determined place, character, and power. There is no abolition of 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 to 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:

²⁸ *Ibid.* *efficax ad videndum Deum.*

²⁹ 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 312-6: *quamvis 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.*

³⁰ Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 15.1 corpus, pars 2, p. 480, lines 356-358: *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.

³¹ 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.*

³² *Ibid.* 18, p. 157, lines 306-7: *earum cognitio in quadam uniueralitate et confusione, quod est cognitionis imperfecte.*

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.³³

In his *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, Aquinas explicitly opposes Augustine, who on this point “followed Plato as much as the Catholic faith allowed.”³⁴ For Plato and Augustine, “forms of things separated from sensibles and immobile” (as Plato has it)³⁵ 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.”³⁶ 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.”³⁷ 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.³⁸

According to Thomas: “the possible intellect according to its natural way of working is not in potential except to those forms which have become intelligible

³³ *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 University Press, 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 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.

³⁴ 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*, 112-113. 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 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*, edited by John Inglis (Richmond [England]: Curzon Press, 2002) 126-150.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 112, lines 509-10: *species rerum separatas a sensibilibus et immobiles*.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 113, lines 518 and 526-27: “rationes rerum in mente diuina” and “secundum quod eas mens nostra participat.”

³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 112, lines 511-14: *posuit in homine uirtutem cognoscitiuam supra sensum, scilicet mentem uel intellectum, illustratam a quodam superiori sole intelligibili*.

³⁸ E.g. Aquinas, ST 1.79.3; 1.79.4 ad 3; Aquinas, *De Veritate* 10.6; and 10.8 ad in contrarium 10.

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.³⁹

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.⁴⁰ 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.”⁴¹ “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.”⁴²

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.⁴³ The light “of which Aristotle speaks is immediately impressed on us by God, and by this we

³⁹ 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 phantasmatis 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 phantasmatis abstrahit; et inde est quod nec Deum nec substantias alias immateriales cognoscere possumus naturaliter nisi per res sensibiles.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 18.1 ad 1, pars 2, p. 532, lines 242-44: *lumini corporali respondeat lumen intellectus agentis quasi medium sub quo intellectus videt.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 18.2 corpus, pars 2, p. 536, line 97.

⁴² *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.*

⁴³ Aquinas, *De Spiritualibus Creaturis* 10 ad 8, p. 113, lines 538-41: *supra sensum est uirtus intellectiua, que iudicat de ueritate, non per aliqua intelligibilia extra existentia, set per lumen intellectus agentis, quod facit intelligibilia.*

discern the true from the false and the good from the evil.”⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵ 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 intellectual....⁴⁶

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.

5. This is what emerges from Houston Smit’s “Aquinas’s Abstractionism.” 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.”⁴⁷ After attending to features of Thomas’ teaching about intellectual light to which I have pointed above, Smit concludes that “Thomas is

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 10 corpus, p. 107, lines 325-27: *lumen intellectus agentis, de quo Aristotiles 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.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Aquinas, *De Veritate* 16.3 corpus; Aquinas, *ST* 1.79.4; *idem*, *De Spiritualibus Creaturis* 10 corpus.

⁴⁶ Aquinas, *De Veritate* 16.3 corpus, pars 2, p. 510, lines 46-51: *impossibile est quod synderesis extinguatur sicut impossibile est quod est hominis privetur lumine intellectus agentis, per quod principia prima et in speculativis et in operativis 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.

⁴⁷ Houston Smit, “Aquinas’s Abstractionism,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10 (2001): 85-118 at 87 and 86, note 6.

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.⁴⁸ I am not convinced that Aquinas is self-consciously aiming overall for this reconciliation. 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 begins with an account of Thomas’ views on the limitations of sensory cognition, “explaining how it is limited to the external accidents of things,” not reaching to their natures, “because it represents things only in images.”⁴⁹ 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.”⁵⁰ 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.”⁵¹ 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 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.*⁵²

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 88.

⁴⁹ *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.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 97.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 95.

⁵² 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.

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 intelligibile*,’ [and] that whereby they subsist in their own natures, ‘*esse 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.⁵³

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.”⁵⁴ 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’.”⁵⁵

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.”⁵⁶ Because the natures of things are properly known in the uncreated light, “it follows [...] that a created intellect cognises a thing’s

⁵³ Smit, “Aquinas’s Abstractionism,” 98.

⁵⁴ Aquinas, *ST* 1.84.5: *Ipsium enim lumen intellectuale quod est in nobis, nihil est aliud quam quaedam participata similitudo luminis increati, in quo continentur rationes aeternae.*

⁵⁵ Smit, “Aquinas’s Abstractionism,” 99 citing Aquinas, *ST* 1.14.6 with 1.55.2 *ad* 1 and 1.84.2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 101.

nature by participating, however faintly and imperfectly, in God's grasp of the way in which the thing participates in divine being."⁵⁷

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 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."⁵⁸

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.⁵⁹ 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.⁶⁰ 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

⁵⁷ *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.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 104.

⁵⁹ 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.

⁶⁰ Smit, "Aquinas's Abstractionism," 105 and 112-113.

intellect' (CPA [= *Commentary on the Posterior Analytics*] I lec. 5) as well as the concepts of unity and truth."⁶¹ 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.⁶²

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."⁶³

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."⁶⁴ Our

⁶¹ *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 116-123: *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. Set 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.*

⁶² *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 iudicamus, dicimur 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....*

⁶³ *Ibid.* 109.

⁶⁴ *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 sillogismi ponuntur in genere cause efficientis); effectus autem, ante quam producat in actum, preexistit quidem in causis actiuis uirtutem, non autem actu, quod est simpliciter esse; et similiter, ante quam ex principiis demonstrationis deducatur conclusio, in ipsis quidem principiis precognitis precognoscitur conclusio uirtute quidem, non autem actu : sic enim in eis preexistit. Et sic patet quod non precognoscitur simpliciter, set secundum quid.* Thomas goes on to argue against what he represents as Plato's doctrine in the *Meno*: *Secundum uero Platonis sentenciam, conclusio erat precognita simpliciter,*

intellect is able to make itself actually 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.⁶⁵

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.”⁶⁶ 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.”⁶⁷ 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.”⁶⁸ 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.⁶⁹

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.”⁷⁰ 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 is abstracted from phantasms.”⁷¹ Smit comments: “in producing from itself the universal conceptions that are ‘certain

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.

⁶⁵ Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 8.15 corpus, pars 2, p. 269, lines 122-129: *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.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 11.1 corpus, pars 2, p. 351, line 281: *potentia activa completa.*

⁶⁷ Smit, “Aquinas’s Abstractionism,” 111.

⁶⁸ 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.*

⁶⁹ 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.*

⁷⁰ Smit, “Aquinas’s Abstractionism,” 112.

⁷¹ Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 18.8 ad 3, pars 2, p. 559, lines 118-120: *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 phantasmatis abstrahatur.*

likenesses of uncreated truths'...the agent intellect gives intelligible species their form of intelligibility."⁷² 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.⁷³

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.

6. 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.⁷⁴

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

⁷² Smit, "Aquinas's Abstractionism," 113.

⁷³ *Ibid.* 118.

⁷⁴ See Wayne J. Hankey, "'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.

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,”⁷⁵ 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 (*resoluendo*) 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.⁷⁶

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*):

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 (*resoluendo*) 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.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ 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*.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 162, lines 360-372: *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 resoluendo cum proceditur ab effectibus ad causas, eo quod cause sunt effectibus simpliciores et magis immobiliter et uniformaliter permanentes; ultimus ergo terminus resolutionis in hac via est cum peruenitur ad causas supremas maxime simplices, que sunt substantie separate.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p. 162, lines 372-382: *“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, resoluendo autem quando e conuerso, eo quod uniuersalius est simplicius; maxime autem uniuersalia sunt que sunt communia omnibus entibus, et*

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 (*resoluendo*), 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.⁷⁸ 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*.⁷⁹ 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*.⁸⁰ The doctrine reappears in the *Summa theologiae* where 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.⁸¹

ideo terminus resolutionis in hac uia ultimus est consideratio entis et eorum que sunt entis in quantum huiusmodi”.

⁷⁸ 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.

⁷⁹ See text of Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, II, 526a-b and note at Sweeney, “Three notions,” 216; on the source of the Dionysian and Eriugenan doctrine in Proclus, see *ibid.* 216-24 and Jean Scot Érigène, *De la Division de la Nature, Periphyseon, Livre I et II*, introduction, traduction et notes par Francis Bertin (Paris: PUF, 1995) 423-4, 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*, edition, translation, and introduction by L. Michael Harrington, *Dallas Medieval Texts and Translations* 4 (Paris/Leuven/Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2004) and *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy: The Thirteenth-Century Paris Textbook Edition*. Edition, Introduction, Translation, and Notes, by L. Michael Harrington. *Dallas Medieval Texts and Translations* 12 (Paris/Leuven/Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2011); 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) 349-356.

⁸⁰ Aquinas, *In librum Beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio*, ed. C. Pera (Turin/ Rome, Marietti, 1950) 1.1.2, §51, p. 17-8.

⁸¹ 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*

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.⁸² 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*.⁸³ 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.”⁸⁴ As to the unification of aspects: Louis Geiger in his famous article on abstraction and separation in the *Super de Trinitate* referred to the aspect “purement objective” and “l’aspect subjectif.”⁸⁵

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 comprehends and surpasses the other uses of *resolutio* by Aquinas.⁸⁶ 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.⁸⁷ In the *reditus* or “perfection seconde”—to use the term of Édouard Weber—what was implicit in the universals has been explicated.⁸⁸

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.

⁸² Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 10.8 ad 10, pars 2, p. 323, line 386.

⁸³ At *Super Boetium de Trinitate*, 5.1 ad 9, Thomas denies that there is a “*circulus in deffinitione*” (p. 141, lines 370-1) and p. 141, lines 367 and 369-70.

⁸⁴ *Super Boetium* 6.4 corpus, p. 170, lines 112-3: “*principia demonstrationum indemonstrabilia*” and 123-5: “*naturaliter cognita homini manifestantur ex ipso lumine intellectus agentis, quod est homini naturale*”.

⁸⁵ 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) 139-183 at 144 and xxi-xxiii.

⁸⁶ Sweeney, “Three notions,” 216-8 and 241.

⁸⁷ 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*, edited J.J. O’Cleary, Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, De Wulf-Mansion Centre, I.XXIV (Leuven and Paris: Leuven University Press and Les Belles Lettres, 1997) 369-79.

⁸⁸ For the “perfection seconde” in relation to the “perfection première” and a list of passages from Aquinas, see Wéber, *Dialogue et dissensions* 463-65.

7. We have reached:
 - a. a form of the emanations and the return of the logical circle to its principle with which our seminar has been was concerned,
 - b. one that is connected with the root of abstracting reason by the human participation in divine *intellectus*,
 - c. the participation is the ground of the natural operation of human scientific reason,
 - d. properly the rational explication of what is implicit in *intellectus* is total,
 - e. and it is circular because it is total,
 - f. the truth of the assumed, or power of what is given, is established by the circular completion of the total explication,
 - g. by this we come back to the principle, to contemplating it, and to the knowledge of ourselves in it.

Thus it seems to me that we have come to a Thomistic and Aristotelian version something like that blending of Aristotle and Augustine by which Robert said: “It is axiomatic that one cannot demonstrate a first principle by reference to anything prior to it; one can demonstrate it only by showing that it is necessarily presupposed by everything subsequent to it. St. Augustine’s claim is that the self-conscious life of the mind presupposed as its centre and ground the illumination of a principle of absolute self-consciousness, in which *memoria*, *intellectus* and *voluntas* are perfectly united without confusion. The concept of that Trinitarian principle, declared *foris* in the revealed word, is authenticated *intus* as the mind on its inward journey discovers itself as image, presupposing that principle. And the conclusion is indubitable in the sense that a denial of the Principle would imply a denial of the actuality of the self as self-conscious *imago*. Thus, the concept of the Trinity grasped by faith is the starting-point and guide to an understanding of self-consciousness, while the understanding of self is, in turn, the continuing and ever more complete demonstration of that starting-point.” This has been my aim. It remains to leave with you a few statements which may help a little more in understanding the reason and character for grounding rational abstraction in participation of the Divine *vouç*.

Claude Lafleur, examining a work from the years between 1231 and 1235 attributed to one Jean le Page, a Master of Arts at Paris,⁸⁹ finds “... les traits de la libre reprise artienne d’un farabisme, teinté d’avicennisme”: “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.”⁹⁰ Science belongs to the soul, its structure, and its self-knowledge. There is in this

⁸⁹ 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): 248-271; idem, “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 Zêtêsis (Paris -Québec: Vrin- Presses de l’Université Laval 2000) 216-223.

⁹⁰ Lafleur, “Abstraction, séparation et tripartition,” 262.

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 of traits 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."⁹¹ 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.*⁹²

Ultimately we witness during the transition from the Greek Neoplatonists and Peripatetics to the Arabic Peripatetics 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.*⁹³

I cannot detail the history here, but the result is that, when Aquinas asserts the light "of which Aristotle speaks is immediately impressed on us by God"⁹⁴, his statement should be altered to "the light of which Averroes speaks is immediately impressed on us by God." The last step before arriving at Aquinas comes with Averroes.

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

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² A. de Libera, *La querelle des universaux: De Platon à la fin du Moyen Age*, Des travaux (Paris: Seuil, 1996) 123.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 69-70.

⁹⁴ Aquinas, *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, 10 corpus, p. 107, lines 325-26.

[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.»⁹⁵

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.⁹⁶

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.

8. How does the soul know that by which it knows? With this question we shall conclude. To answer it we must turn to Proclus and 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.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 121.

⁹⁶ 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. Set hoc esse non potest, quia etiam ipsa principia indemonstrabilia cognoscimus abstrahendo a singularibus, ut docet Philosophus in fine Posteriorum. Vnde oportet preexistere intellectum agentem habitui principiorum, sicut causam ipsius. Ipsa uero principia comparantur ad intellectum agentem ut instrumenta quedam eius, quia per ea facit alia intelligibilia esse actu.* See also Aquinas, *In de Anima*, 3.4 (430a10-18), *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2.78.

Proclus teaches in the *Elements of Theology*: “Every soul possesses all the forms which the intellect possesses primitively.”⁹⁷ 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 things are in it because it knows them.”⁹⁸ 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.”⁹⁹

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.¹⁰⁰

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.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, ed. E. R. Dodds, 2^e ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) Prop. 194, p. 169.

⁹⁸ Aquinas, *Super Librum De Causis Expositio*, ed. H.-D. Saffrey, *Textus Philosophici Friburgenses* 4/5 (Fribourg: Société Philosophique, Louvain: Éditions E. Nauwelaerts, 1954) Prop. 14^a, p. 84: *In omni anima res sensibiles sunt per hoc quod est exemplum eis, et res intelligibiles in ea sunt quia scit eas.*

⁹⁹ *Super Librum De Causis*, Comment on Prop. 14^a, p. 86, lines 5-7: *sic igitur patet quod sensibilia praeexistunt in anima sicut in causa quae quodammodo est exemplar effectuum.*

¹⁰⁰ 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 University Press/Les Belles Lettres, 1997) 293-309 at 296.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 296-7.

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.”¹⁰²

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.¹⁰³

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 essence...of the soul. This is as it were the “breathing thought” of the soul, a rational activity in virtue of its being...”¹⁰⁴

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

¹⁰² Aquinas, *De Veritate*, 11.1 *corpus*, pars 2, p. 351, line 281: *potentia activa completa*.

¹⁰³ Steel, “Breathing Thought,” 302.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 306.

its own *ousia* explicit to itself, the soul must draw them forth through what Proclus calls projection (*probolê*).¹⁰⁵

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: “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.” In relation to Proclus, Corrigan puts Thomas' doctrine this way: “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.”¹⁰⁶

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.¹⁰⁷ Proposition 15 of the *Liber de causis* states: “Every knower knows its essence. Therefore, it reverts to its essence with a complete reversion.”¹⁰⁸ 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

¹⁰⁵ 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*, Ph.D. 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.

¹⁰⁶ 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), 149-172 at 157. See idem, “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.

¹⁰⁷ See Corrigan, “L'Auto-réflexivité,” 157-159 and Hankey, *God in Himself*, 96ff.

¹⁰⁸ Aquinas, *Super Librum De Causis*, Prop. 15^a, p. 88: *Omnis sciens scit essentiam suam, ergo est rediens ad essentiam suam reditione completa*.

through the stamp of the agent intellect—with knowledge derived from sense which the abstracting work of the intellect enables.

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