

'Why Philosophy Abides for Aquinas'

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Aquinas needs and values philosophy which remains distinct from *sacra doctrina*. This philosophy in its diverse parts and branches has its own subject matters, tasks, scientific disciplines and certainties. These statements appear so incontrovertible even to those who deny them that reasserting them seems prolix. Yet they are denied, boldly in the face of all the contrary evidence, and for what seem to be important reasons. Finally disposing of philosophy's autonomy is required for a "radically orthodox" position' which assaults 'autonomous naturalism as "nihilistic".'¹ It belongs to the campaigns against philosophy as 'foundational' and in favour of 'rationality as tradition-constituted'.² In a weaker form, diminishing philosophy in Aquinas may be undertaken in order to overcome the Neo-Scholastic misrepresentation of Aquinas transformed into a modern rationalist in the war against modern rationalism.³ In trying again to show why philosophy abides as distinct from theology as sacred teaching for Aquinas, I shall return to two old problems brought before us by those would deny or diminish its separate autonomy. I will look at what Thomas is doing in his commentaries on Aristotle's works and at the relation of metaphysics and *sacra doctrina*. As in any reassertion of what is 'incontrovertibly' the case, much of what follows will be banal. I hope to add something to the discussion by placing Thomas' writing within the forms of philosophy and theology developed in the philosophical schools of late Antiquity into whose inheritance he was initiated and grew, and which he continued. Placing him in this context may be of some immediate use because part of the reduction of philosophy being endeavoured has been effected by attention to Thomas' Platonism much of which he derived from those schools.

A. PHILOSOPHY AND COMMENTARY

Commenting on the works of The Philosopher, whether on the *Liber de causis*, officially attributed to him in the list of his works given with the permission to lecture on them in the University of Paris in 1255, or on his authentic writings, was not a preliminary exercise belonging to Thomas' early years. Almost all of the twelve commentaries were undertaken in the last six years of Thomas' writing and, like the *Summa Theologiae*, five were left unfinished.⁴ That they were enterprised along with his own proper *Summa* suggests that he regarded engaging the philosophical tradition to be necessary to his work as a Christian theologian. Besides this, Aquinas had the stimulus of having not only the new translations of Aristotle provided by William of Moerbeke, but also the Moerbeke translations of the *Elements of Theology* of Proclus (finished in 1268) and of the late Greek commentators (beginning around 1260).⁵ These he used outside his commentaries on the *Liber de causis* and Aristotle's works. The *Summa Theologiae*, the *Disputed Questions On Evil*, and the treatise *On Spiritual Creatures* benefited from his reading of Simplicius -- the translation of his *Super De Interpretatione* was completed in 1268 and the *Super De Caelo* in 1271.⁶ The last scriptural expositions were aided by what he had learned about Proclus.⁷

Aquinas had been initiated into the hermeneutical traditions of philosophy emerging from late Antiquity from the beginning, having studied Aristotle with The Commentator at hand.

¹ J. Milbank and C. Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*, Radical Orthodoxy (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 20 and 21.

² C. Early, 'MacIntyre, Narrative Rationality and Faith', *New Blackfriars*, 82:959 (2001), 35.

³ Of the many efforts at this, I shall refer to those of Mark Jordan, 'Theology and Philosophy', *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. N. Kretzmann and E. Stump (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 232-251 and earlier works cited *infra*.

⁴ I. Aertsen, 'Aquinas's Philosophy in its Historical Setting', *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, 20; M.D. Jordan, *The Alleged Aristotelianism of Thomas Aquinas*, The Etienne Gilson Series 15 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1992), 9-10.

⁵ R.A. Gauthier in Aquinas, *Expositio Libri Posteriorum*, Editio altera retractata (Leonina 1989, vol. 1, pars 2), 55*.

⁶ For the *Summa Theologiae* (Leonina [Marietti, 1952]), see 2-1, 49-52.

⁷ See *Super Epistolam ad Colossenses* (Cai 1953), 1.4 sections 40 - 42.

Latin, as well as Arabic, commentators were early influences on his reading of the history. There are Boethius, Macrobius, and Calcidius. Later, there were the Greek commentators on whom the Arabs and Latins depended: Ammonius, Alexander of Aphrodisias, John Philoponus, Simplicius, and Themistius.⁸ As a result of his accumulating knowledge, in the last decade of his life Aquinas becomes ever more deeply both knowledgeable about and inserted within the interpretative mentalities of late Antiquity. Some of the commentaries belong to traditions which have either already assimilated Plato and Aristotle on crucial points, even if they also still set them against each other -- this is true of the Arabic Peripatetics like Averroes.⁹ Others like Boethius, Ammonius and Simplicius are engaged in reconciling the two greatest philosophers or, at least, present their positions as complementary.

Aquinas has imbibed the approach of the ancient schools to philosophy and its history. For him, philosophical reasoning has a comparable relation to the authority of great teachers and sacred texts: it is exegetical, traditional and hierarchical.¹⁰ Mark Jordan judges that, in contrast to the Aristotelian ordering of the sciences, Thomas 'adopts something much more like the Platonic hierarchy'.¹¹ In fact, hierarchy does derive the character it has for Aquinas from Iamblichan, Proclan and Dionysian Neoplatonism.¹² The dialectic of the *quaestio* aims for the reconciliation of a hierarchy of authorities and discourses in which philosophy has a subordinate place, as it does among the later Platonists. There is a testing of the first principles of reason, but, 'it is a procedure of dialectical inquiry which begins from received philosophical opinions, that is, from philosophical traditions.'¹³

In this reception, commentary is essential. For Aquinas and his predecessors, commentary is not passive receptivity. Besides philosophical judgment, it endeavours real historical investigation. The commentator distinguishes rational demonstration of the truth of things from historical work, and from the dialectic of positions which history makes possible. Historical investigation, dialectical inquiry, and rational demonstration are all part of philosophy as textual commentary. It determines the subject of the work among the ordered hierarchy of disciplines, and to what philosophical tradition the work being investigated belongs. The commentator analyses how it stands to that tradition, sorting out what in the work genuinely stands within the philosophical school, what is inauthentic, what has been distorted, and where the author, moved perhaps by a better authority or reason, has taken another path.

So in his exposition of the *De divinis nominibus* (between 1265-1268), Aquinas corrects his earlier judgment that Dionysius 'mostly followed Aristotle' and, discerning his Platonism, situates his positions in relation to what he takes to be Platonic.¹⁴ When later (probably about 1272), he wrote the last question of his *De Malo*, having by this time read the *Elements of Theology*, Aquinas was definite about the philosophical allegiance of the Areopagite: 'Dionysius was in most things a follower (*sectator*) of Platonic positions'.¹⁵ Critical then for his progress as an historian of philosophy was his analysis of the *Liber de causis* in light of the *Elements*. Thomas' commentary involved a detailed comparison of these two books with the *De divinis nominibus*.¹⁶ He discerned, of course, that the *Liber* was not the work of Aristotle but had been excerpted by an Arabic

⁸ See W.J. Hankey, 'Aquinas and the Platonists', in *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period -- A Lexicographic Approach*, ed. M.J.F.M. Hoenen and S. Gersh (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, in press).

⁹ Alain de Libera, *La querelle des universaux: De Plato à la fin du Moyen Age*, Des Travaux (Paris: Seuil, 1996) 68-124.

¹⁰ M.D. Jordan, *Ordering Wisdom. The Hierarchy of Philosophical Discourses in Aquinas*, (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame University Press, 1986), 185-201; see P. Hadot, 'Théologie, exégèse, révélation, Écriture dans la philosophie grecque', reprinted in his *Études de philosophie ancienne*, L'ane d'or (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1998), 27-58.

¹¹ Jordan, *Ordering*, 194.

¹² See W.J. Hankey, 'Aquinas, Pseudo-Denys, Proclus and Isaiah VI.6', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age*, 64 (1997), 59-93.

¹³ Jordan, *Ordering*, 190.

¹⁴ Compare *In Sententiarum*, lib. 2, dist. 14, quest. 1, art. 2 with *In De divinis nominibus*, proemium, and 5.1, sect. 634.

¹⁵ *De Malo* (Leonina 1982, vol. 23), 16, 1 ad 3.

¹⁶ See *Super Librum De Causis Expositio* (Saffrey Fribourg 1954), xxxvi

philosopher from Proclus. He went on to sort out of what in it was Platonic and what not, where it differed from and where it agreed with Aristotle, Dionysius and the Christian religion.

Removing works from Aristotle's authorship to the Platonic tradition, getting clearer about the characteristics of Platonism, and discerning where Christians and Arabs departed from it, was not Thomas' only enterprise as historian of the philosophical schools. Nor were commentaries his only medium for this activity. In his treatise *On the Unity of the Intellect against Parisian Averroism* (1270), Aquinas employs what Alain de Libera has shown to be critical historical method in respect to philosophical traditions.¹⁷ He is using Simplicius, Themistius, and Alexander of Aphrodisias, amongst others, in an effort to refute philosophers like Siger of Brabant in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Paris who claim to be true Aristotelians. Crucially, he is determined to do this without leaving the sphere of philosophy.

For Thomas this destruction has two aspects: historical and philosophical. In the first chapter of the work he tells us that he intends to show the position of these contemporary Latin philosophers to be 'no less against the principles of philosophy than against the documents of faith.' It is opposed to the words and opinion of Aristotle, the *institutor* of the Peripatetic school to which they claim to belong. In the second chapter, Thomas traces the history of the teaching about the unity or multiplication of the intellect -- whether there is one for all humans or whether it is multiplied according to the number of human souls -- in the Peripatetic school. His survey was pieced together with extraordinary skill from a very diverse, somewhat contradictory, and incomplete collection of Latin, Greek and Arabic sources. He concluded that Averroes, whose interpretation of Aristotle Thomas' Parisian colleagues were following, 'was not so much a Peripatetic as a corrupter of Peripatetic philosophy'. This judgment was possible in great part because Aquinas had already worked out what he took to be the position of Aristotle when he wrote his exposition of the *De Anima* between the end of 1267 and September 1268. The doctrine of man in the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*, composed at the same time, shows the result of this strictly philosophical work, one he was determined to carry into 'the city of philosophers' with the *De Unitate*.

Two other late, but short and complete, works demonstrate Thomas' determination to trace as thoroughly as possible the history of philosophy so as to make judgments about its schools. He wants to understand the fundamental principles from which their positions derive, what each has contributed to the indispensable work of philosophy, where each fails, where they agree and disagree, and how their opposed positions complement one another.¹⁸ *On Spiritual Creatures* and *On Separate Substances* sort out the contributions, opposition, concord, and complementarity of the two great philosophical schools. In texts like the following from the *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, and in the *De Substantiis Separatis*, Aquinas follows and reproduces the great Neoplatonic commentator on Aristotle, Simplicius, in characterizing what is proper to the *via Platonica* and the *via Aristotelica*. According to Aquinas and Simplicius, we have a pair of differing arguments which exhaust the possibilities:

The diversity of these two positions stems from this, that some, in order to seek the truth about the nature of things, have proceeded from intelligible reasons, and this was the particular characteristic of the Platonists. Some, however, have proceeded from sensible things, and this was the particular characteristic of the philosophy of Aristotle, as Simplicius says in his commentary *Upon the Categories*.¹⁹

¹⁷ See Thomas d'Aquin, *L'Unité de l'intellect contre les Averroïstes suivi des Textes contre Averroès antérieurs à 1270*, texte latin, traduction, introduction, biographie, chronologie, notes et index par A. de Libera, 2nd ed. (Paris: GF-Flammarion, 1997).

¹⁸ For his method of analysis, see R.J. Henle, *Saint Thomas and Platonism. A Study of the Plato and Platonic Texts in the Writings of Saint Thomas* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956), 295.

¹⁹ *Tractatus de Spiritualibus Creaturis*, ed. L. W. Keeler, Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana Textus et Documenta, series philosophica 13 (Rome, 1959), a. 3. Aquinas appears to be referring to Simplicius, *Commentaire sur les Catégories d'Aristote*, Traduction de Guillaume de Moerbeke, ed. A. Pattin, 2 volumes, Corpus Latinorum commentariorum in

The *via Platonicorum* begins and proceeds *ex rationibus intelligibilibus*, and thus thinks in terms of the inherent independence of the separate substances. For Thomas, though there are problems with this approach to reality, it was not only a necessary step on the way to Aristotle, but also corrects deficient tendencies in the *via Aristotelica*, which proceeds *ex rebus sensibilibus*.

This mutual characterization occurs within a schematized progressive history set up in terms of simple oppositions, and its assumption is the ultimate reconcilability of the two schools. Thomas' sources for the history so represented are the best possible, the Platonic tradition in late Antiquity and, increasingly, Simplicius himself. Simplicius filled his commentaries with extended quotations from the history of philosophy, including Peripatetics, especially Alexander of Aphrodisias himself, and much of what we know today about texts which were not preserved comes from him. The weakness and strength of these Hellenic conciliators, labouring to preserve their religious and intellectual tradition both by transmitting it and by showing its unity, emerges at this point. In his anxiety to bring concord, the interpreter is induced to misunderstandings which enable agreement. Ironically, these misconceptions incite his greatest philosophical creativity.²⁰ They permit the construction and use of logical figures like 'motionless motion' and 'a thing is conceived according to the mode of the conceiver' by which Aristotle and Plato are united just where they differ. Aquinas adopts many of these reconciling conceptions and his own treatment of his authorities has the same weakness and strength. For example, to give the best possible interpretation of one text, he reads an Arian distinction between Father and Son as anti-Sabellian.²¹

Thomas knows more about the two great philosophical ways than their doctrinal differences. Under the guidance of Simplicius, he also discerns differences between the hermeneutical principles of the Peripatetic and the Platonic commentators, as well as between the interpretative methods of those they follow. His commentary on Aristotle's *De Caelo*, left incomplete at his death in 1274, imitates the form and reproduces much of the content of Simplicius' commentary on the same work. This involves a shift from his earlier following of an Averroist style of commentary practiced in the Arts Faculty at Paris.²² As usual when following others, Aquinas gives a shortened and simplified rendition, in this case of the prolix history of philosophy offered by Simplicius. Thomas adopts as his own Simplicius' judgments on the hermeneutical principles and practices of the Peripatetics and Platonists, as well as on many of the matters at issue.²³

Several times he tells us that Aristotle is a literalist. Plato speaks like the theologians who 'hand on divine things poetically and in stories'.²⁴ Plato 'says everything figuratively and teaches through symbols, intending something other through his words than what they themselves say'. Aristotle argues against the literal sense of the words, not rejecting Plato's arguments 'in respect to Plato's intention,' but *quantum ad sonum uerborum eius*.²⁵

This discernment of the differences between the hermeneutical traditions requires Thomas to make a judgment as to the importance of hermeneutic in knowledge. Some of the interpreters, Simplicius in particular, say that 'these poets and philosophers, and principally Plato' ought not to be understood 'according the superficial signification of their words, but in accord

Aristotelem Graecorum 1-2, vol. 1 (Louvain - Paris: Publications Universitaires de Louvain - Éditions Béatrice Nauwelaerts, 1971), prologus p. 8 line 70-p. 9 line 85.

²⁰ P. Hadot, 'Philosophie, exégèse et contrasens', reprinted in *Études de philosophie ancienne*, 3-11.

²¹ See J. van Banning, 'Saint Thomas et l'*Opus Imperfectum in Matthaeum*', *Atti dell'VIII Congresso Tomistico Internazionale*, ed. A. Piolanti, viii (Vatican City: Editrice Vaticana, 1982), 73-85.

²² Jordan, 'Alleged', 11-14.

²³ F. Bossier, 'Traductions latines et influences du *Commentaire In de Caelo* en Occident (XIIIe-XIVe s.)', *Simplicius sa vie, son oeuvre, sa survie*, ed. I. Hadot, Peripatoi 15 (Berlin & London: de Gruyter, 1987), 289-325 (pp. 304-308) gives a list of points of agreement and disagreement.

²⁴ *In De Caelo*, 1.22, sect. 227.

²⁵ *Sententia libri de Anima* (Leonina 1984, vol. 45, pars 1), cap. 8, p. 38, lines 3-9.

with the *sapientia* which these writers wished to hide under their stories and aenigmatic speech'.²⁶ Such interpreters maintain that usually Aristotle was not against Plato's understanding 'which was sound, but against his words'. Thomas agrees with Simplicius at several points that, if the intellectual content rather than the words was confronted, agreement would be found.²⁷ In contrast to the approach of Simplicius, the one of Alexander of Aphrodisias was like Aristotle's and perhaps even more exigent. He wished that 'Plato and other ancient philosophers' be understood just as their words signify externally (*exterius sonant*). In consequence, Alexander supposed that Aristotle was trying to argue 'not only against the words, but against their intellectual intention' and refuses possible conciliations.²⁸

In the end, Thomas judges, however, that we ought not to be too concerned with this difference. The study of philosophy is not about what humans might perceive (*quid homines senserint*), but how the truth of things would actually have it (*qualiter se habeat veritas rerum*).²⁹

B. THE TRUTH OF THINGS

What is the meaning of this laconic judgment? Thomas discerned differences between Platonic and Aristotelian hermeneutical approaches. He reproduced the history of philosophy of Simplicius once he has his commentaries, agreed with many of his conciliating judgments, and used the same reconciling logical figures. He practiced a similar strategy throughout his writing, and in this commentary Aquinas goes so far as to find 'something divine' in the myth that Atlas holds up the heavens (ironically, the sense of the myth he excludes as false is that the heaven has *gravitatem*)³⁰ Nonetheless, Thomas does not place himself explicitly within either philosophical tradition. Moreover, he subordinates hermeneutic to truth. Does he suppose himself to stand above human perspectives and interpretative traditions? Put otherwise, why does he oppose 'the truth of things' to human perceptions?

His opposition involves two conceptions of truth which are harder for us to reconcile than they were for him. At present many of those most careful about the way truth functions in intellectual and spiritual traditions are against philosophy as 'foundational', having an autonomy requiring a subject matter and substantial tasks of its own. Despite the fact that Alasdair MacIntyre, John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock undertake to put Aquinas with themselves on one side of this opposition, Thomas is not well placed here. We cannot, however, dispose of these contemporary followers of Thomas by simply taking the part of those on the other side of this division. These suppose that Thomas is separating himself from Simplicius when he sides with the truth as against human opinion.³¹

An examination of Moerbeke's translation reveals the contrary. Simplicius had made the same point as Thomas did centuries later about the difference between the truth of things and divided human opinions, and Thomas makes it in the same place in his commentary where Simplicius had made it in his.³² For both, commenting on a philosophical text was a form of doing philosophy, even natural philosophy of which the *De caelo et mundo* was a part. Indeed, commentary is the primary form of philosophy, one in which authentication, exposition and clarification of the argument, finding its sources, comparison between positions, and all the other

²⁶ *In De Caelo*, 1.22, sect. 228.

²⁷ For a small sampling of Thomas' reproduction of Simplicius' history and acceptance of his judgments on the hermeneutic principles compare Aquinas, *In De Caelo* (Spiazzi 1952), with Simplicius, *Commentaria in quatuor libros de celo Aristotelis*, Guillermo Morbeto Interprete, (Venice, 1540) as follows: prooemium, sect. 4 = prooemium; 1.6 sect. 61 = fol. 14^va, comm. 11; 1.22 sects 223-228 = fol. 46^a - fol. 47^b, comments 98-100; 1.23 sect. 233 = fol. 48^b, comm. 102; 1.29 sect. 277 = fol. 54^va, comm. 125; 1.29 sect. 283 = fol. 55^b - ^va, comm. 129; 2.3 sect. 314 = fol. 61^a, comm. 5; 3.2 sects 551- 555 = fol. 90^r comments 4 & 5.

²⁸ *In De Caelo*, 1.22 sect. 228.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *In De Caelo*, 2.1 sect. 295.

³¹ Bossier, 'Traductions latines', p. 306; Aertsen, 'Aquinas's', 21.

³² Simplicius, *Commentaria in de celo*, fol. 47^b, comm. 100.

activities of historical inquiry were subordinate to philosophical reasoning. No more than Aquinas, had Simplicius thought that his report of the positions of others and his reconciling strategy set him against finding the truth of things. Both commentators were aware of Aristotle's teaching on this question. At the beginning of the third book of the *De Caelo*, Aristotle points to the priority of the search for theoretical truth in philosophy and goes on, having investigated diverse opinions, to determine the truth of the matter himself. Thomas certainly had Aristotle's distinction in mind, and would not have supposed Simplicius to have differed from Aristotle on this. Thomas' commentary on this place in Book Three is simply lifted from that of Simplicius, *Morbeto interprete*.³³ Unfortunately, Thomas died before he was able to comment on Book Four where he said that Aristotle had determined the truth on this matter!

Aquinas, like Simplicius, works within a framework where theology as Aristotelian metaphysics has been surpassed by a theology which has access to the religious revelation and activity of the divine. Within this overarching theology (in Proclus best displayed in the *Platonic Theology*), philosophy has a subordinate place. It is an handmaid, says Aquinas, borrowing from Aristotle.³⁴ Iamblichus and his successors would agree. Thus, neither for Aquinas, nor for the Neoplatonic commentators he so often follows, is there an unbridgable opposition between the reconciliations upon which *sacra doctrina* depends and a demonstratively rigorous philosophical establishment of 'the truth of things'. This means, of course, that neither for Thomas, nor for Simplicius, does theology as the ultimate reconciling wisdom dissolve the truth of the philosophical sciences.

When, in beginning the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas proposed another teaching beyond the philosophical account of every kind of being, including the divine (*ST* Ia.1.1 obj. 1), he did not suppose that the necessity for holy teaching eliminated the human need for the others. On the contrary, because sacred doctrine is at least as much like the *Platonic Theology* as it also mirrors the metaphysics of Aristotle, it begins with the First, operates in its own exalted sphere, and embraces oppositions beyond the comprehension of the philosophical sciences -- e.g. those between the theoretical and the practical, wisdom and science, God and his effects, metaphorical and conceptual language. It uses the ratiocinative demonstrations of the sciences without destroying their integrity. The difference of *sacra doctrina* from the philosophical sciences, including metaphysics, is one of genus.³⁵

In the mediaeval university this difference involved a difference of place. The Faculty of Arts was 'the city of philosophers' (as Albertus Magnus put it).³⁶ That spatial separation coincided with another. It seems that, for Aquinas, belonging to a philosophical school was not appropriate for Christians³⁷ -- though this does not evidently prevent Origen, Augustine, and Dionysius, for example, being represented by him as 'following' Plato or Aristotle, or his proposing that theological positions are philosophically determined.³⁸ If Mark Jordan is right that, for Aquinas, "'philosophers" [...] always seem to be unbelievers',³⁹ the result is not that philosophy is destroyed by the advent of Christianity. On the contrary, it must retain an autonomy. Philosophy belongs to the nature, which grace and *sacra doctrina* presuppose, and do not destroy but perfect.⁴⁰ Thomas entered the city of philosophy and reasoned within its norms

³³ *In De Caelo*, 3.2 sect. 551 and Simplicius, *Commentaria in de celo* fol. 90^ra, comm. 4.

³⁴ *ST* Ia.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: Edizioni Domenicane Italiane, 1975), 181-85.

³⁵ *ST* Ia.1.1 ad 2, see J.F. Wippel, *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 18.

³⁶ Aertsen, 'Aquinas's', 24 and see 20-21.

³⁷ Jordan, 'Theology', 233-234.

³⁸ On Origen see *Quaestiones Disputatae De Potentia* (Pession, 1965), 6.6 ad 2; *Super Boetium De Trinitate* (Leonina 1992, vol. 50), 3.4, resp., p. 116, lines 124-134; *De Substantiis Separatis* (Leonina 1968, vol. 60, pars D), cap. 12.

³⁹ Jordan, 'Theology', 234.

⁴⁰ *ST* Ia.1.8 ad 2 and 1a.2.2 ad 1; see Aertsen, 'Aquinas's', 35.

to correct it. He was valued there and indeed suspected of conceding too much to it.⁴¹ But the dignity of *sacra doctrina* and its difference from a philosophical science, even the highest, requires that the sacred theologian maintain his distance.

Sacred doctrine does not prove the principles of the other sciences which for Thomas ‘either are self-evident [...] or are proved by some natural reason in some other science’.⁴² John Milbank is wrong to collapse this distance and dignity by extending ‘theology proper (*sacra doctrina*)’ to the ‘concrete specificities’ of ‘the philosophical liberal arts’.⁴³ The neo-Gilsonian Christianization of philosophy for which he aspires may be Augustinian -- in any case, Descartes following him will try to make it so.⁴⁴ But the Aristotelian sciences of the thirteenth-century are handed on through the tradition of commentary we have been considering. ‘Rationality as tradition-constituted’, to use a phrase from Alasdair MacIntyre,⁴⁵ keeps rationality and the Christian religion from becoming identical. The authority of the founders of the philosophical schools and of their textual traditions help sustain philosophy as reason’s work prior to faith -- and help keep it too pagan for Christian moderns. Following what he takes to be Aristotle’s teaching, Aquinas will establish the sciences through a rational power possessed by each human and by maintaining the differences between and the limits of the forms of knowing. We must have philosophical sciences because humans do not know as God or angels do.⁴⁶ Despite the efforts of Pickstock and Milbank to dissolve Aquinas’ Aristotelian noetic into intellectual intuition and Augustinian illumination in order, anachronistically, to find a way around Kant and to reduce philosophy to ‘theology proper’, Thomas is moving in the other direction.⁴⁷

Thomas holds to his early exposition of the *De Trinitate*. There he followed distinctions deriving from the Arabic Peripatetics and developed in the Parisian Faculty of Arts between the kinds of abstraction which make the sciences a human work.⁴⁸ On this basis, he constructed a hierarchy of the disciplines. He is still making these distinctions in the *De Veritate*,⁴⁹ in the *De Substantiis Separatis*, and in his exposition of the *Liber De Causis*.⁵⁰ In these last two, the difference between the two kinds of abstraction which constitute mathematics and the natural sciences, on the one hand, and separation, which theology and its really separate substances require, on the other hand, is crucial in discerning a philosophical and religious error at the heart of Platonism. It posited universals as existing separately *in re*, and called these gods. In fact, universals exist instead as abstractions constructed by and belonging to thinking.⁵¹

Because of his teaching on abstraction, Aquinas’s treatment of human knowing cannot be assimilated to a Platonic or an Augustinian illuminationism. And we cannot affirm with Milbank ‘that, for Aquinas, all our thought is primarily intuitive, albeit in a very weak degree, and so, *in toto* “metaphysical” or rather “theological”’.⁵² Milbank and Pickstock fundamentally misconceive how Aquinas understands our participation in God’s knowing. Participation does not mean that we do what God does in the way that God does it, the difference being only a

⁴¹ See Fergus Kerr, ‘Thomas Aquinas’, in *The Medieval Theologians*, ed. G.R. Evans, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 207.

⁴² *ST* 1a.1.6 ad 2.

⁴³ Milbank, *Truth*, 42.

⁴⁴ S. Menn, *Descartes and Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 24, 47-49, 74, 132, 206, 322-36; Z. Janowski, *Index Augustino-Cartésien: Textes et Commentaire*, Histoire de la philosophie (Paris: Vrin, 2000), 11-16.

⁴⁵ Early, ‘MacIntyre’, 35.

⁴⁶ For the dependence of the sciences on maintaining the limits of the forms of knowing see *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate* (Spiazzi 1964), 15.2 ad 3.

⁴⁷ Milbank, *Truth*, 22-24, 51, note 8 at 118 and note 103 at 126.

⁴⁸ 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), 249-269, on its origins see de Libera, *La querelle*, 110-116.

⁴⁹ *De Veritate*, 2.6 ad 1.

⁵⁰ *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 1 p. D 42 lines 80-92.

⁵¹ See *In librum Beati Dionysii de divinis nominibus expositio* (Pera 1950), 4.1 sect. 276; *De Substantiis* cap. 4 p. D 47 lines 3-19; *Super Librum de Causis*, prop. 3 p. 18 lines 8-14; prop. 10 p. 67 line 19- p. 68 line 7; prop. 13 p. 83 lines 8-17.

⁵² Milbank, *Truth*, note 103.

matter of degree. Rather, two Neoplatonic principles, that ‘a thing is known according to the mode of the receiver’ and the law of mediation, or *Lex divinitatis*, require that we humans know in our own proper way, i.e. rationally. Our knowing is discursive and we have ‘no special power through which simply and absolutely and without moving from one thing to another we might obtain knowledge of the truth’.⁵³ For Thomas, human knowing beginning with sensible particulars comes to the knowledge of universals only by abstraction from these. Attention to Thomas’ treatments of the agent intellect, our power to abstract, and so to *make* the objects of our intellection, and thus also our sciences, shows that these are subversive of Augustine.

The light permitting Augustine’s intellectual intuition is turned by Aquinas into the power of our agent intellect to make intelligible things. In his *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, Aquinas explicitly opposes Augustine, who on this point ‘followed Plato as much as the Catholic faith allowed’.⁵⁴ For them, ‘the immobile forms of things separated from sensibles’ (as Plato has it) 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’. 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’. THIS IS ALL IN DQ DE S C 10 AD 8 Against this, Aquinas changes the light to that of the agent intellect. Its light and its objects cease to be things outside us. The light has become an internal power to make something in our own minds.⁵⁵

In order to avoid giving human reason this power of making, Pickstock totally misrepresents Thomas’ doctrine of abstraction. According to her, the form of a sensible thing ‘leaves its substance’ and ‘becomes an abstract species’. Like some Platonic idea with wings, it ‘travels through the human senses ... into the mind of the observer’. It ‘enters the passive intellect’ and is ‘articulated or expressed by the active intellect’.⁵⁶ Laurence Hemming has corrected part of her error -- abstraction is from matter, not from substance.⁵⁷ Further, and crucially, the intellect does not passively receive a form which has somehow detached itself from its material existence and flown into it. Pickstock needed to have gone no further than the *De Veritate* to have found Thomas’ authentic teaching: ‘the possible intellect according to its natural way of working is not in potential except to those forms which have become intelligible through the agent intellect’. The agent intellect makes the forms exist in the possible intellect by abstracting them from ‘phantasms’.⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹ Seeing and intellection require light. In the case of intellection we supply the light by which the image is made knowable. Our thinking requires us to make an image intelligible by abstracting the form so that it comes to be in our minds. On this

⁵³ *De Veritate*, 15.1. See ad 2 and ad 8 of this article, as well as the whole of 15.2 and 8.2 ad 3.

⁵⁴ The account in *De Veritate*, 10.6, “Whether the Human Mind receives cognition from sensibles” is essentially the same as that in the *De Spiritualibus Creaturis* 10 ad 8 [concerning the unity of the agent intellect] and the objections direct it against Augustine as well as Plato. The account in the *Summa theologiae* 1a.79. 4 and 5 make it a dispute between Plato and Aristotle although Augustine is in the first articles. REVISED SINCE PUBLICATION.

⁵⁵ E.g. *ST* 1a.79.3; 1a.79.4 ad 3; *De Veritate*, 10.6; 10.8 ad in contrarium 10.

⁵⁶ Catherine Pickstock, ‘Radical Orthodoxy and the Mediations of Time,’ in *Radical Orthodoxy? - A Catholic Inquiry*, ed. L.P. Hemming (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 72. It is ironic that Pickstock’s representation has something in common with the modification of Aquinas introduced by Suárez intended to prevent the abstracting power producing any change in what is given, see Franz Brentano, “*Nous Poïêtikos*: Survey of Earlier Interpretations,” in *Essays on Aristotle’s De Anima*, edited by Martha C. Nussbaum and Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 313-341 at 321.

⁵⁷ J.P. Hemming, ‘Introduction,’ in *Radical Orthodoxy?*, note 24, page 12.

⁵⁸ *De Veritate*, 18.2.

⁵⁹ *De Veritate*, 18.1 ad 1.

account human knowledge of God and other immaterial substances is ‘naturaliter’ restricted to the power of our minds, knowing ‘per res sensibiles.’⁶⁰

With Aquinas, the work of abstraction by which our world of knowledge is made is radically humanized. In opposition to almost the whole Peripatetic tradition (but not the Neoplatonic commentators), and most directly 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 *per lumen intellectus agentis, quod facit intelligibilia*, is multiplied according to the number of individual human souls so to belong to each of them.⁶¹ The light ‘of which Aristotle speaks is immediately impressed on us by God’.⁶² The impression or seal of the divine light is not, as Milbank claims, ‘a share of the divine intuition’ giving us ‘an intuition of *esse* along with all the other transcendentals and divine attributes’. Milbank’s assertion that the doctrine ‘must amount to this’ despite the lack of anything explicit is wishful thinking.⁶³

No two positions could be more opposed on illumination than the Platonic - Augustinian and the Aristotelian as Thomas represents them, and as the struggles and condemnations of the 1270s showed. Thomas’ position can only exist by subverting that of Augustine. Crucially, Thomas’ philosophical shift from Plato to Aristotle on truth is theologically determinative. For Aquinas our power of abstraction is what makes us capable of understanding revelation, which comes from and teaches about the separated substances. Equally, it limits our knowledge of them.⁶⁴ That knowledge is mostly negative because these substances are not abstracted from matter, but are really separate from it. Composed of form and matter, our being, and its way of knowing, make us fundamentally unable to know their manner of existence.

Among philosophy’s tasks there are two which humans require and which only it can perform because it begins with the sensible where human knowledge must start. In Thomas’ accounts of the history of philosophy, Plato plays an essential role. Since our knowing does begin from the sensible, if, as the ancient Physicists did, we ascribed to knowing the flux which belongs to its starting point, we would conclude by destroying the possibility of certain knowledge.⁶⁵ Plato took a correct step away from this by giving truth a fixed object in natures separated from the material flux. This move against the Physicists is correct because a reversal is required: ‘the nature of knowledge is opposite to the nature of materiality’.⁶⁶ But, in simply changing the direction of the movement between knower and known so that the character of knowledge is transferred to reality instead of reality to perception, Plato remains too close to his adversaries. Agreeing with them that ‘like is known by like’, Plato falsely projected unto reality what properly belongs to mind. His error is double -- bestowing on reality what is mind’s own and taking away from mind its proper work and the merit which belongs to that.⁶⁷

For Thomas the foundational work of philosophy is an absolutely necessary labour: ‘to save certain knowledge of the truth as something we can possess intellectually’.⁶⁸ In this, Aristotle’s superiority to Plato is first that, conforming to the humble necessity of human nature, his way from sensible things is *manifestior et certior*.⁶⁹ As a result, Thomas can assert in the *De*

⁶⁰ *De Veritate*, 18.2.

⁶¹ *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, 10 ad 8; see *De Veritate*, 16.3; *ST* 1a.79.5. On the Peripatetics, see H.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), vii, 8, 220: 15-17 and 25-35.

⁶² *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, 10 ad 10.

⁶³ Milbank, *Truth*, note 8, 117-118.

⁶⁴ *De Veritate*, 8.3 resp. and ad 3; 8.8 ad 3; 8.15; 10.11; 10.13 [on why we cannot know the Trinity by natural reason].

⁶⁵ *De Substantiis Separatis*, cap. 1 p. D 42 lines 66-70.

⁶⁶ *ST* 1a.84.2.

⁶⁷ *Super de Trinitate*, 5.3 p. 149 lines 275-290; *ST* 1a.84.1; *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, 10, ad 8.

⁶⁸ *ST* 1a.84.1: *salvare certam cognitionem veritatis a nobis per intellectum haberi*.

⁶⁹ *De Substantiis Separatis* cap. 2 p. D 44 lines 11-13. Compare *ST* 1a.2.3.

Veritate: ‘we discover that God exists’, *rationibus irrefragabilibus etiam a philosophis probatum*.⁷⁰ Without this, Romans 1.20, which holds that the invisible things of God are understood from creation, would be false, because we cannot understand God unless we can demonstrate that he is.⁷¹ There is a second superiority of the Aristotelian way. Because in it human thought is the creative labour of abstraction by which the universal, and thus science, come into being, philosophy elevates the human. This work of philosophy has also an essential theological result.

Aquinas never tires of reminding us that the knowledge of sensible particulars is natural to us. It belongs to our ‘natural perfection’ not to know God except *ex creatura* and so by abstraction from sensible things.⁷² Thus, such knowledge of God as we can have is either attained at the end of a long, difficult, and error filled upward road,⁷³ or it must be given us from above. It is in fact given, but the gift by itself does not solve the problem. How, with a form of knowing the complete contrary of God’s own, shall we understand his speech to us? How shall we understand speech from and about separate simple incorporeal substances? Here revealed theology needs philosophy, not because of what God’s knowledge lacks, but because of our human deficiency. Like his Neoplatonic predecessors, Thomas is always aware that our theology, though valid because it participates in higher forms of knowledge, belongs to human reason. By its labour of abstraction, human science exercises our minds in the absolutely necessary knowledge of intellectual objects separated from matter. However, philosophy has limits. With them negative theology begins. Because we know by abstraction, rather than in the way proper to beings whose existence is independent of matter, our knowledge of these is more negative than affirmative.

The essential ignorance which results from the fact that humans are not separate intellects and can only know about them analogically is missing from Pickstock’s account and this lacuna is central to the misrepresentations which govern *Truth in Aquinas*.⁷⁴ However, despite its limits, without philosophy, we would not understand divine speech at all.⁷⁵ Thus, I agree with Milbank and Pickstock that ‘faith still demands discursive argumentation’ and that there can be no ‘confinement to Biblical revelation independent of the Greek legacy of metaphysical reflection’. However, I cannot concur with the denial determined by the fundamentals of Radical Orthodoxy that there is in Aquinas ‘a philosophical approach to God independent of theology’.⁷⁶

The labour of philosophy is summarised in the *quinque viae*. The knowledge of simple separate being they provide enables Thomas to begin his treatise on the divine names with simplicity.⁷⁷ For Aquinas, what Anselm and the Franciscan Augustinians in the thirteenth-century propose as a way to God amounts to a refusal to recognise the nature and limits of human knowing, and thus to undertake the necessary philosophical labour. Anselm’s way does not even count as a proof. It is rather an assertion that the existence of God is self-evident. Though God’s existence is self-evident in itself, it is clearly not so for us because humans have even thought that God was a body.⁷⁸ Anselm’s error is to confuse our knowledge with God’s own. There is a like confusion on Milbank’s part which follows (as he indicates) from Pickstock’s earlier excessive optimism about human intellectual intuition.⁷⁹

⁷⁰ *De Veritate* 10.12; see also 14.9 resp. and ad 9.

⁷¹ *ST* 1a.2.2 sed contra.

⁷² *De Veritate*, 18.2.

⁷³ *De Veritate*, 14.10 and *ST* 1a.1.1.

⁷⁴ Pickstock, *Truth*, 8 and 12.

⁷⁵ *ST* 1a.1.5 ad 2.

⁷⁶ Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth*, xiii and see 25-26.

⁷⁷ My argument here is given *in extenso* in chapters 2 and 3 of my *God in Himself, Aquinas’ Doctrine of God as Expounded in the Summa Theologiae* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁷⁸ *ST* 1a.2.1 ad 2. It is significant that *De simplicitate Dei* begins with the question *Utrum Deus sit corpus* and starts its answer by reference to God as *primum movens immobile*, *ST* 1a.3.1. See *De Veritate*, 10.12.

⁷⁹ Milbank, *Truth*, 22-23.

Anselm's argument and Augustinian illumination have in them the remains of a Platonic capacity to turn directly to God by an inward and upward way apprehending the truth by means of the ideas. The Plotinian undescended higher soul, always engaged in a contemplation of which we are mostly unconscious but to which we can always attend, is still with us. Plotinus seems to have been conscious that his doctrine of the undescended noetic human soul was 'unorthodox'. In any case the late Academy regarded him as having an 'non conformist attitude' in respect 'to Platonic orthodoxy'.⁸⁰ Within the Platonic school, the decisive turn against this inward intellectual illumination as immediately accessible to the human soul was made by Iamblichus.⁸¹ He protested against the false optimism of the Plotinian position. For him and for almost all Neoplatonists after him, the whole individual human soul was descended into the realm of sensible becoming and could only rise to self-knowledge, and to true knowledge of what is above soul, through an outward turn to the material.

For our purposes the most important follower of Iamblichus was Proclus, because the later Neoplatonism which comes to Aquinas through the *Liber de causis*, Dionysius, and ultimately the *Elements of Theology* is Proclan. Via Proclus, the Iamblichian turn against immediate self-knowledge and intellectual intuition does determine Thomas' view of human knowing.⁸² Agreeing with the harsh realism of the post-Iamblichian Platonists about how humans know, Aquinas turns with them to Aristotle. The Aristotelian account of knowing determines essentials of his understanding of truth, and of the methods, structures, and work of philosophy. It is significant that the originator of the programme of reading and commentary for post-Plotinian scholastic Neoplatonism was probably Iamblichus. The reading of Aristotle was essential to this curriculum. The exercises of mediaeval Aristotelian Scholasticism, *lectio* and *disputatio*, were the methods of teaching and examination developed in the philosophical schools of Antiquity.⁸³ The commentaries of Aquinas are the result of this *lectio*. So we return to the activity by which the distinct philosophical sciences continue for Aquinas. About one of these there are special problems, namely, the master of them, metaphysics.

C. METAPHYSICS AND *SACRA DOCTRINA*

Aquinas has left us a late well-informed commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (1269) and its *prooemium* treats the question which now vexes us.⁸⁴ Its doctrine does not differ substantially from his early *Super Boetium De Trinitate* which also treats what concerns us: the relation between metaphysics and *sacra doctrina*.⁸⁵ This question is complex for several reasons. Aristotle's doctrine is not easy to discern. He gives the science more than one name, and metaphysics is not one of these. It was the title ascribed to the text by its Alexandrine editors, who may also have invented the science by putting together what were independent treatises written at different points in Aristotle's life. They may thus have united an abstract science of being just as being (with no other qualification) with a theological treatise on separate substances written at a stage when Aristotle was more immediately a Platonist than he was later to become. If, in fact, the three sciences of first philosophy (which considers the causes), of being as being, and of theology are

⁸⁰ Blumenthal, *Aristotle and Neoplatonism*, 18; H.D. Saffrey, *Le Néoplatonisme après Plotin*, Histoire des doctrines de l'antiquité classique 24 (Paris: Vrin, 2000), viii; see R.M. Van den Berg, 'Towards the Paternal Harbour: Proclean Theurgy and the Contemplation of the Forms', 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 I, XXVI (Leuven - Paris: Leuven University Press - Les Belles Lettres, 2000), 425-26.

⁸¹ See M. Edwards, *Neoplatonic Saints, The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by their Students*, Translated Texts for Historians 35 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), xl for a quick and accurate sketch of the position.

⁸² W.J. Hankey, 'Between and Beyond Augustine and Descartes: More than a Source of the Self,' *Augustinian Studies*, 32:1 (2001), 81-88

⁸³ P. Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?* Collection Folio/Essais (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 387.

⁸⁴ *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Expositio*, (Cathala 1971).

⁸⁵ For a good summary of what it says and for unrefuted criticism of Milbank on Aquinas, see N. Lash, 'Where does Holy Teaching Leave Philosophy? Questions on Milbank's Aquinas', *Modern Theology*, 15:4 (1999), 433-444.

one, then Aristotle's *Metaphysics* will seem to be the pre-eminent instance of the onto-theology which is the object of Heidegger's analysis so determinative for metaphysics in our time.

Aquinas follows Aristotle in giving a number of names to *Metaphysics*, but he has no doubt about the unity of this science which is the wisdom that regulates so as to draw things into unity. It is the queen (*domina*) of the other philosophical sciences and its three names belong to one science. It is 'divine science or theology' so far as it considers the separate or divine substances. It is 'metaphysics' so far as it considers 'being as being' and what belongs to it. It is 'first philosophy' because 'it considers the first causes of things'. Its relation to *sacra doctrina* involves the connection between these aspects of the one science. Beginning from the sensible as all human science must, it has as its subject not the divine but being as being, or *ens commune*. It rises to the consideration of the divine, that is to theology and, for reasons we have already given, its knowledge of the divine is primarily negative, a knowledge that God exists rather than what he is. Thomas is clear, however, that knowledge of something's existence and nature can never be totally divided, because, if they were, we would not know at all what we were talking about.⁸⁶ If the identity of *esse* and *essentia* in God has as a consequence the ultimate inseparability of the knowledge that God is and what he is, it has also another side. 'The act of existence by which God subsists in himself (*esse qua Deus in se ipso subsistit*)' is just as unknown as is his essence!⁸⁷

Crucially, only *sacra doctrina* has God for its subject and this is in virtue of his revelation of himself to us (*ST* 1a.1.7). The two theologies, metaphysical and sacred, are related as two sides of a circle: the metaphysical moving up to God, the sacred moving down from him. They must meet: 'because the natural reason ascends to the knowledge of God through creatures and the knowledge which faith has descends from God to us in the opposite way through divine revelation, the way up is same way as the way down.'⁸⁸ If they did not, *sacra doctrine* as theology would not know the existence of its subject matter according to a scientific demonstration and would not have the means to make revelation intelligible. Their meeting cannot be perfect in this life because our knowing depends upon abstraction from matter. In consequence, we neither have face to face knowledge of God who is separate from matter nor proper knowledge of material singulars.⁸⁹ Importantly, Pickstock, in seizing on Thomas' comparison of God's knowledge to that of a 'country bumpkin', and as one might predict, holding to this knowledge in opposition to the abstract scientific reason of the astronomer, is as mistaken on the question of the knowledge singulars as both she and Milbank are on our intuitive knowledge of God. In fact the two kinds of knowing are complementary, even if ultimately inadequate.⁹⁰ For human knowing, the cosmic connecting points are in fact unhinged. Perhaps the pointing, without touching, of the fingers of the Father and Adam on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel best represents the situation.

Two problems arise and they are connected. Having unified metaphysics and then linked it to the revelation of God in *sacra doctrina* so that God's primary name is 'He Who Is' or *ipsum esse* (*ST* 1a.13.11), is Aquinas' theology onto-theology? Jean-Luc Marion (along with others too numerous to list) have thought so and either turned away from Aquinas or revised his theology in an extreme apophatic direction so to as transform him into what they supposed would escape Heidegger's critique.⁹¹ However, Marion retracted his position in *Dieu sans l'être* and made Aquinas' theology into theo-ontology instead. This was done by carefully separating *sacra doctrina* from metaphysics in Aquinas. The project has been continued by Marion and others partly

⁸⁶ *Super de Trinitate*, 6.3 and Milbank, *Truth*, 30.

⁸⁷ *ScG* 1.12; see J.-L. Marion, 'Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'onto-théo-logie', *Revue thomiste*, 95:1 (1995): 43.

⁸⁸ *ScG* 4.1; *Super de Trinitate*, 5.4 and see my *God in Himself*, Endnote 1, 162-163.

⁸⁹ *De Veritate*, 2.5, 2.6 and 10.5.

⁹⁰ See Pickstock, *Truth*, 14 and 'Radical Orthodoxy and the Mediations of Time,' 72 and Hemming's correction '*Quod Impossibile Est!* Aquinas and Radical Orthodoxy,' in *Radical Orthodoxy*, 79.

⁹¹ See my '*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.

through keeping the triple aspects of metaphysics separate both in Aristotle and in his successors.⁹² John Milbank has adopted a contrary strategy with respect to Heidegger and endeavoured to reassert ontology but to ‘evacuate’ philosophy as metaphysics so that ‘metaphysics collapses into *sacra doctrina*’.⁹³ I shall conclude this paper by comparing their treatments. Before we can do this another problem arises.

Earlier, I noted the three-fold division of abstraction, which derived from the Arabic Peripatetics as understood in the Faculty of Arts at Paris and by which Aquinas established the philosophical sciences. The common doctrine is that two of these abstractions are properly so called: the one by which the physical sciences are constructed, the other by which mathematics is made. The third is not properly abstraction, and it establishes metaphysics. This is separation, so called because what it considers is always actually separate from matter and motion, as the divine is, or is separate at least in some instances (e.g. substance, being, actuality). There are many difficult and much controverted questions concerning separation. In what way does it depend upon abstraction? What acts of the human mind does it involve? How does it grasp *esse*, the Being which both designates God, and joined to *commune*, may, like *ens commune*, designate the subject matter of metaphysics?

These issues confront us because it belongs to Milbank’s dissolution of metaphysics into *sacra doctrina* to make ‘*esse*, which is primarily infinite, not *ens* or *esse commune* which is an abstraction from the finite’ the subject of metaphysics. Thus, ‘it would, like *sacra doctrina*, be concerned with “specific natures”, since *esse* includes all plenitude of form, and as transgeneric does not hover remotely beyond specificity’.⁹⁴ As often happens when Milbank is pleading for an interpretation which suits his needs but is opposed by the evidence, the sentence from which I have quoted is a question. Another Milbankian technique is to insist strongly on precisely what the text does not say -- as when the question *De existentia Dei in rebus* (*ST* 1a.8) is made into ‘the heading of the divine substance’ on the basis of a counterfactual assertion that infinity is ‘dealt with under the divine essence (or substance)’. In fact, ‘infinity’ is not singled out from the other names which are considered under the divine *essentia*, and there is no ‘or substance’ at the place indicated, which would make substance and essence equivalent. By these misrepresentations, Milbank leads us to the Spinozistic conclusion that ‘there cannot really be any being “other” than God’. From thence we proceed to the kind of identity of nature and grace against which Aquinas resolutely set himself despite Augustinian persecution. For the modernised monistic Thomas of Radical Orthodoxy, ‘all creatures subsist by grace’, and ‘the intellect [is] grace’.⁹⁵ This is certainly the reinterpretation of Thomas against his own words which Milbank promised, and belongs to what James Hanvey has called Radical Orthodoxy’s ‘strategy of deception’, a ‘colonisation’ of history.⁹⁶

Returning to Aquinas, in fact, metaphysics for him does not and cannot have *esse* in Milbank’s sense as its subject because this would mean that God was its subject. But this difference in their subjects is, for Aquinas, the fundamental difference between metaphysics and *sacra doctrina* and enables metaphysics to serve holy teaching. Metaphysics moves to the divine from the knowing with which we begin by separating being as being from specific restrictions. It does not start with the specific nature of the divine fullness. If metaphysics did not make this move, ‘theology proper’ would neither need it, nor could we use it. The position for which Milbank wishfully pleads amounts to something like the view that the separation by which mind knows being as being -- and thus constitutes metaphysics in order to move to theology -- already

⁹² See J.-L. Marion, ‘La science toujours recherchée et toujours manquante’, (13-36) and other of the principal addresses to the XXVII^e Congrès de l’ Association des Sociétés de Philosophie de Langue Française in *La métaphysique: son histoire, sa critique, ses jeux*, ed. J.-M. Narbonne and L. Langlois (Paris: Vrin, 1999).

⁹³ J. Milbank, ‘Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics’, *New Blackfriars*, 76:895 (1995), 49-59 and *Truth*, 39.

⁹⁴ Milbank, *Truth*, note 84, 125.

⁹⁵ Milbank, *Truth*, 37-38, note 71, 123.

⁹⁶ Milbank, *Truth*, 20-21 and J. Hanvey, ‘Conclusion: Continuing the Conversation,’ in *Radical Orthodoxy?*, 155 and 164.

requires the knowledge of the theological conclusion, namely the knowledge of the divine separate substances. John Wippel's judgment that this is not required is the right one: 'because Aquinas holds that it belongs to the metaphysician, as a goal or end of his science, to demonstrate that such a reality does exist or, as he puts it, to reach knowledge of the principle or cause of the subject of metaphysics, God.'⁹⁷ Were Milbank to be right, he would once again have dissolved the difference between Aquinas and his Augustinian opponents by having us begin with an intellectual intuition of God. He would have immediately united *sacra doctrina* and the finite sciences, thus depriving them of their independence. In consequence, he would have succeeded again in depriving metaphysics of any real work. As well as contradicting what Thomas says about how we know, this leaves us without an explanation as to why Aquinas continues with metaphysics and assigns it such an essential role. Thomas' *sacra doctrina* would also become vulnerable to Heidegger's criticism of onto-theology. This consideration brings us finally to Marion.

Having defined the three marks of onto-theology for Heidegger with reductive precision, Marion examines Thomas' doctrine to see if it has them. He concludes that it does not, but his approach is the opposite of Milbank's. In order to prevent the reciprocal knowledge of God and being,⁹⁸ Marion brings out the difference between ontology and theology, in both its forms, philosophical and revealed. He notes that Aquinas does not speak often about metaphysics because for him metaphysics 'designates, not without ambiguity, a discipline strictly philosophical and natural' (37). After giving an exact account of the three names of metaphysics, and the connection of the considerations they designate, he asks whether this is not exactly what is meant by onto-theology (37).

Marion responds to his own question by reporting on the difference between metaphysics and sacred doctrine, quoting Aquinas on how they 'differ according to genus' (37). Revelation thus sets 'theology proper' beyond determination by ontology. The remainder of the article is largely devoted to showing how Aquinas escapes from the onto-theology of those who succeeded him. Crucial to his escape, and to his difference from later Scholastics, is that being as being (*ens commune*), the subject of metaphysics, does not include God. God is its cause, and divine realities are not known in this science in themselves but relative to their effects. The relation to God in metaphysics is as 'the principle of the subject' (38). Common being depends on God, not vice versa (41). Thus Marion does not confuse the subject of the science with its principle by calling both of them *esse*, in order to collapse metaphysics into sacred doctrine and to cancel the difference between cause and effect. Rather he remains faithful to the differences which Aquinas carefully draws. An essential distinction is that between *ens* and *esse* (52). In maintaining the differences, Marion refuses the temptations of a Gilsonian 'Christian philosophy' (58) with its 'metaphysics of Exodus' (62). Central to his exposition and argument is the unknowability of the divine *esse* for Aquinas (61-63, 65). Because Aquinas declines to annul the difference between philosophy and sacred doctrine, God does not become knowable in virtue of a metaphysical *esse*. There is an irreducible excess (65).

Ultimately, for Marion, it is this difference between metaphysics and sacred doctrine which allows Aquinas 'to think the to-be from the direction of the unknowability of God'.⁹⁹ Some may wish another explanation for the unknowability of the divine *esse*, one which more forth-rightly embraces the Neoplatonic determination of the Thomistic doctrine of being.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ J.F. Wippel, 'Metaphysics' in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, 89; see Wippel, *Metaphysical Themes*, 69-104.

⁹⁸ Marion, 'Saint Thomas', 43 & 63. There is a useful summary in B.J. Shanley, 'St. Thomas, Onto-theology and Marion', *The Thomist*, 60 (1996), 617-625.

⁹⁹ Marion, 'Saint Thomas', 65, note 82: *penser l'être à partir de l'inconnaissabilité de Dieu*.

¹⁰⁰ Hankey, *God in Himself*, 5-6; D. Bradshaw, 'Neoplatonic Origins of the Act of Being', *The Review of Metaphysics*, 53 (1999), 383-401.

However, it is to Professor Marion's credit that, on the way to his final explanation, he retains the difference between sacred doctrine and metaphysics for Thomas and accounts accurately for it. In maintaining that philosophy abides he tells the truth about Aquinas.¹⁰¹

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