

Thomas' Neoplatonic Histories: His Following of Simplicius¹

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I. WHAT PHILOSOPHY OWES TO THE UNITY OF PHILOSOPHY AND HISTORY IN SIMPLICIUS

Vivian Boland has recently exhibited for us how, in the *Prima Secundae* of the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas self-consciously borrows notions regarding *habitus* from Simplicius in order to develop an adequate doctrine of the virtues. Thomas, as philosophical theologian and as commentator on Aristotle, engaged with this sixth-century predecessor in the conceptualizing and distinguishing activity we, and both of them, call philosophy.² The concepts and distinctions involved Aquinas owed to the *Commentary on the Categories of Aristotle* by Simplicius, which William of Moerbeke had finished translating in March of 1266.³ There are other explicit borrowings of philosophical ideas owed by Thomas to this *Commentary* and to the only other by Simplicius possessed by Aquinas, that on Aristotle's *De Caelo*, which Aquinas also had

1. This paper was written for the Aquinas Symposium at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology, Berkeley, California, in March 2002, devoted to Thomas' Platonism. I am most grateful to my hosts, especially Mark Delp and Fr Richard Schenk O.P. The article is dedicated to Dominican scholars upon whose work it depends: Fathers Louis Bataillon, Henry-Dominique Saffrey, Leonard Boyle, Edward Booth, whose generosity to me match their learning, and to two other Dominicans, whose work on Neoplatonism and on the sources of Aquinas, respectively, are the *sine qua non* of our efforts: Père André-Jean Festugière and Père René-Antoine Gauthier. For the contributions of some of these figures, and what we owe to them, see W.J. Hankey, "Denys and Aquinas: Antimodern Cold and Postmodern Hot," *Christian Origins: Theology, Rhetoric and Community*, ed. Lewis Ayres and Gareth Jones, *Studies in Christian Origins* (London, 1998) 139–84 and idem, "French Neoplatonism in the 20th Century," *Animus* 4 (1999): an electronic journal at <http://www.mun.ca/animus/1999vol4/hankey4.htm>.

2. Vivian Boland, "Aquinas and Simplicius on Dispositions—A Question in Fundamental Moral Theory," *New Blackfriars* 82.968 (October 2001): 467–78; see also W.J. Hankey, "Why Philosophy Abides for Aquinas," *The Heythrop Journal* 42.3 (2001): 329–48.

3. Simplicius, *Commentaire sur les Catégories d'Aristote*, *Traduction de Guillaume de Moerbeke*, ed. A. Pattin, 2 volumes, *Corpus Latinorum commentariorum in Aristotelem Graecorum* 1–2 (vol. 1, Louvain/Paris, 1971; vol. 2, Leiden, 1975). There is a list of citations by Aquinas at vol. 1, xiv; at 1, xi, Pattin dates the work.

through a translation by William, this one signed on 15 June 1271.⁴ However, we, and Thomas, have a wider debt to this pagan Neoplatonist. Simplicius had been a student in the Academy under its Neoplatonic head, Damascius, when it was closed by the Christian Emperor Justinian. He worked, as his Christian contemporary Boethius explicitly did, in order to preserve the doctrines of his predecessors for the coming barbaric age, and he quotes them at extraordinary length in his commentaries. Evidently, what moved him and Boethius is far more vitally powerful than antiquarian interest.

Simplicius wrote his commentaries at the end of his flight from Christian persecutions. The prisoner in *The Consolation of Philosophy* is Boethius, about to be tortured to death at the command of the Arian King Theodoric and comforted by the philosophical heritage he had imbibed in better times. In it, an inclusively Platonic Lady Philosophy uses the arguments of her Neoplatonic predecessors to solve the problem they also confronted as to whether prayer can be reconciled with a changeless providence.⁵ Boethius receives the religious and intellectual benefit of the construction of a unified philosophical tradition. Preserving the knowledge of the Hellenic intellectual tradition, with which predecessors like Proclus had already made the diverse Hellenistic religious heritage concordant, and constructing its historical shape within a reconciling Platonism like that of Boethius, is of equal

4. For the date see J.-P. Torrell, *Initiation à saint Thomas d'Aquin. Sa personne et son oeuvre, Pensée antique et médiévale*, Vestigia 13 (Paris/Fribourg, 1993) 254. There is no critical edition; I use Simplicius, *Commentaria in quatuor libros de celo Aristotelis*, Guillermo Morbeto Interprete (Venice, 1540). For a discussion of its influence on Aquinas, see F. Bossier, "Traductions latines et influences du *Commentaire In de Caelo* en Occident (XIIIe–XIVe s.)," *Simplicius sa vie, son oeuvre, sa survie*, éd. I. Hadot, Peripatoi 15 (Berlin/London, 1987) 289–325 at 304–08.

5. W.J. Hankey, "Secundum rei vim vel secundum cognoscentium facultatem: Knower and known in the *Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius and the *Prosligion* of Anselm," *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism and Christianity*, ed. John Inglis (Richmond, England, 2001) 126–50 at 128–29. What underlies the argument of the *Consolation* may be traced through the commentary tradition by beginning from Boethius in Ammonius, *On Aristotle's On Interpretation 9*, trans. David Blank, printed with Boethius, *On Aristotle's On Interpretation 9*, trans. N. Kretzmann, with essays by Richard Sorabji, Norman Kretzmann, and Mario Mignucci (Ithaca, 1998) 225.10 ff. This follows Ammonius in Ammonius, *On Aristotle's On Interpretation 9*, 135.14, 98 (see Sorabji's introductory essay, 5–7, especially note 13). Sorabji, in Boethius, *On Aristotle's On Interpretation 9*, 7 and 14, note 21, mentions the *Elements of Theology* prop. 124, in *Tim.* (Diehl) 1.352.5–27, and *de Dec. Dub.* q.2, chs. 7–8 (see also Blank's note 33 at 123 of his translation where he adds *De Providentia* 64). *De Decem Dubitationes* II, 6–8 employs a solution like that of Boethius in order to save contingency from the threat posed by divine predestinating knowledge. *De Providentia* XII, 62–66 uses the relativity of knowledge to the knower to the same purpose and, thus, saves praise, blame, prayer, etc. (see Proclus, *Trois Études sur la Providence*, éd. D. Isaac [Paris, 1977–82] tome I, 61–65 and t. II, 80–84).

spiritual importance for Simplicius. As a result of this work of conservation, Simplicius is so important both for what we, and Aquinas, know about the history of ancient philosophy, and also for how we, and he, approach and construct this history, that identifying completely what we owe him is impossible. Even before we have read a commentary by him, Simplicius has shaped what we know about and how we approach ancient philosophy.

Any collection of the remains of the Pre-Socratics, giving the sources of the fragments of their works we still possess, provides initial evidence about the quantity of the textual content of the history we owe to Simplicius.⁶ He derived a great part of what he knew from Theophrastus. The heir of Aristotle's Lyceum wrote histories of philosophy as part of his contribution to the work of his master for whom: (a) philosophical thinking, (b) gathering its history, and, (c) giving the philosophical past an historical shape, were of necessity undertaken together. More than 800 years later, Simplicius will also distinguish and unite these aspects of Aristotle's philosophical method. The histories by Theophrastus Simplicius possessed have disappeared; we know what was in them largely through his successor's Aristotelian commentaries. The largest part of what we have of the Pre-Socratics is, thus, given to us within the context of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic constructions of the history of philosophy and what we know of them is, no doubt, selected and shaped by this. In fact, we also owe to Simplicius much of what we know of lost works of the greatest Peripatetic commentator, Alexander of Aphrodisias. It is significant for the character of the Peripatetic and Neoplatonic traditions in late Antiquity, among the Arabic philosophers, in the Latin Middle Ages, and beyond, that an important part of what we, and Aquinas, know of the Peripatetic tradition comes from this Neoplatonist.⁷

Towards the end of his writing, Thomas had at least one of the commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias, that on the *De Sensu*, translated around 1260 by Moerbeke, but not used by Aquinas until 1268, when he is undertaking the series of commentaries on Aristotle which occupied a great part of his last years. R.-A. Gauthier finds Alexander mentioned by Aquinas 94 times in his works as a whole.⁸ However, for the often-confused information

6. G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers. A Critical History with a Selection of Texts*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1983) 3–6.

7. See Alain de Libera, *La querelle des universaux: De Platon à la fin du Moyen Age* Des travaux (Paris, 1996) 68–124.

8. R.-A. Gauthier in Aquinas, *Sentencia Libri De Sensu et Sensato*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Commissio Leonina: vol. 45, 2 (Rome/Paris, 1985) 96* (if R. Sorabji is right in "Infinite power impressed: the transformation of Aristotle's physics and theology" [*Aristotle Transformed. The Ancient Commentators and their Influence*, ed. R. Sorabji (Ithaca, 1990) 181–98 at 191] eight of these mentions belong in fact to John Philoponus).

behind most of these citations, Thomas' sources are indirect; primarily the data comes through Averroes and through Simplicius *On the Categories* and *On the De Caelo*. In both cases, nonetheless, the medium conveyed enough that Aquinas was able to use Alexander to refute those from whom he learned his doctrine. Ironically, Thomas was thus able to side with Aphrodisias against Averroes, on the unicity of the intellect,⁹ and with Aphrodisias against Simplicius on the subject of Aristotle's *De Caelo et Mundo*, respectively!¹⁰ In the *Quaestiones Disputatae De Malo* (as sophisticated historically as it is late—probably about 1272), there is a similar use of Simplicius. In *Commento Praedicamentorum* is employed as the source of the comments of “Porfirius” and “Iamblicus” and for information about “Pitagore,” but Thomas finds that its own “*expositio non uidetur conueniens*.”¹¹

In sum, the work of Simplicius, which underlies and permeates the commentary tradition and comes down to us by very many ways, is not only important: (1) for ideas and distinctions used in Thomas' philosophical constructions, (2) for knowledge of the content of the history of ancient philosophy, and (3) of the Peripatetic and Platonic hermeneutical traditions, (4) for theories about the history of philosophy used by Aquinas which will be the ultimate subject of this paper, (5) but also for that which conveys all these, namely the commentaries on Aristotle's works. Courtesy requires us to note in passing that those of Simplicius have an outstanding excellence. Leonardo Tarán maintains that Simplicius on the *Physics* remains the best commentary on that work “even today,” and there are other contemporary defenders.¹² However, more importantly for this paper, the commentaries of Simplicius continue a tradition belonging to the origins and nature of Neoplatonism.

9. See Thomas d'Aquin, *L'Unité de l'intellect contre les Averroïstes suivi des Textes contre Averroës antérieurs à 1270*, texte latin, traduction, introduction, biographie, chronologie, notes et index par A. de Libera, 2nd éd. (Paris, 1997) cap. 2 § 55, 130 and notes, especially 48, note 2.

10. Aquinas, *In Aristotelis Libros De Caelo et Mundo Expositio*, ed. R.M. Spiazzi (Turin/Rome, 1952) proem. 4–5, 2–3. It also works the other way, at *Summa Theologiae* 2–1.50.1 resp., Simplicius is used as a source of a view of Aphrodisias which is then rejected. When quoting the *Summa Theologiae*, I use the Ottawa, Piana edition of 1953.

11. Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae De Malo*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Commissio Leonina: vol. 23 (Rome/Paris, 1982) 1.1 ad 11, 7, line 367–8, line 409.

12. Leonardo Tarán, “The Text of Simplicius' Commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*,” in *Simplicius sa vie, son oeuvre, sa survie* 247. These include Ilseraut Hadot, Richard Todd, and Richard McKirahan. See Ilseraut Hadot, *Le Problème du néoplatonisme alexandrin: Hiéroclès et Simplicius* (Paris, 1978); my review of Simplicius, *On Aristotle's Physics* 5, trans. Urmson (Ithaca, 1997) for *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 9.6 (1998): 585–89 and <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/bmcr>, BMCR 98.3.19; and Simplicius, *On Aristotle's "Physics 8.6–10,"* trans. R. McKirahan, *Ancient Commentators on Aristotle* (Ithaca, NY, 2001) 1.

II. THE RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL PURPOSES OF NEOPLATONIC RECONCILIATING COMMENTARY ON ARISTOTLE

Porphyry records the use of both Platonic and Peripatetic commentaries by Plotinus in his teaching, although he stresses his master's independence from them.¹³ Much in Plotinus' own writing is in fact reinterpretation of earlier works, especially of the dialogues of Plato. Indeed, trying to distinguish what is truly original in Plotinus, Jean-Marc Narbonne demonstrates that this does not lie so much in the doctrine of the One as in understanding it through a particular interpretation of the *Parmenides* of Plato in which the hypotheses become subsistent divine hypostases.¹⁴ Nonetheless, Plotinus composed no commentaries, and, despite his following of Aristotle on many points—including reducing the Forms to what *NOUS* thinks—, he set Plato polemically against and above Aristotle. Beginning with Porphyry himself, for what, significantly, we may call alternatively spiritual, or religious, or psychological, or theological reasons, commentary becomes central to Neoplatonism. Porphyry composed numerous expositions of Aristotle, and set out to reconcile the two greatest Hellenic philosophers—an enterprise Hierocles, a fifth century student of Plutarch of Athens, who moved from Athens to Alexandria and on to Byzantium, identified as characteristic of true Platonists.¹⁵ Porphyry, too effective a critic of Christianity to enable much of his writing to survive, aimed to give authority to the Hellenic tradition by showing its unity. His successors in this enterprise drew religion into this reconciliation so as to develop “theology as science” in a way which enables Henry Saffrey to lead us from Iamblichus to Aquinas and beyond.¹⁶ The old Hellenic Neoplatonism united philosophy and religion for the sake of civilized culture, an inclusive truth, and a rich spiritual life which it was confident would return once the currently ascendant novelties of a narrow barbarism had had their day.¹⁷

13. Porphyry, *Vita Plotini*, trans. A.H. Armstrong, in the Loeb Plotinus, vol. 1 (1966) 13, 40, lines 10–17.

14. J.-M. Narbonne, *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis (Plotin-Proclus-Heidegger)*, L'âne d'or (Paris, 2001) 23–28.

15. Ibid. 27, citing Proclus, *La Théologie Platonicienne* (Saffrey-Westerink) I, 131, n. 2. See H.S. Schibli, *Hierocles of Alexandria* (Oxford, 2002) 27–31.

16. See H.-D. Saffrey, “Theology as Science (3rd-6th Centuries),” *Studia Patristica*, vol. XXIX, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Leuven, 1997) 321–39, trans. from the French “Les débuts de la théologie comme science (IIIe-VIe),” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 80.2 (Avril 1996): 201–20 by W.J. Hankey.

17. See A.Ph. Segonds, “Liminaire,” *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne. Actes du Colloque International de Louvain (13–16 mai 1998) en l'honneur de H.D. Saffrey et L.G. Westerink*, éd. A.Ph. Segonds et C. Steel, Ancient and Medieval Philosophy, De Wulf-Mansion Centre, Series 1, XXVI (Leuven/Paris, 2000) ix–xxvi at xix–xxi.

Although he opposed Porphyry (and Plotinus as interpreted by him) so strongly as to effect the most fundamental shift within Neoplatonism, the “divine” Iamblichus followed his example as commentator and conciliator. In fact, Iamblichus is credited with originating the programme of reading and commentary for the schools in which post-Porphyrian Neoplatonism evolved and was transmitted.¹⁸ Aristotle was essential to this programme. Much of Aquinas’ Neoplatonism—that mediated through Proclus, Simplicius, pseudo-Dionysius, and the *Liber de causis*—belongs to the tradition Iamblichus established. This tradition was much more positive towards Aristotle than was the Plotinian Platonism which Augustine and his followers continued. Aristotle’s teaching became important for the same reasons that Iamblichus defended against Porphyry a theurgy which embraced all levels of human psyche, and made religious rites necessary for the ascent of the soul—the turn of the human soul to the sensible, and the transcendence of the One above being and knowing. The late Academy regarded Plotinus as having a “non-conformist attitude” in respect “to Platonic orthodoxy,”¹⁹ and no more allowed the Plotinian notion that part of the soul was always above in contemplation of *NOUS*, than Aquinas accepted the Augustinian view that the human mind had immediate access to the Ideas in the Divine Word.²⁰ Iamblichus turned Neoplatonism decisively against this peculiarity of Plotinus by teaching that the individual soul was altogether descended into *genesis*, none of it remaining above. He thus simultaneously turned Neoplatonism: (1) toward a positive relation to the sensible and the material, (2) toward Aristotle and to the Aristotelian sciences as a hierarchical anagogy, and (3) toward theurgic (or sacramental) religion. Like Aquinas, he was rumored to levitate.²¹

18. On commentary from Plotinus through Iamblichus, see Luc Brisson, in *Philosophie grecque*, sous la direction de Monique Canto-Sperber, en collaboration avec Jonathan Barnes, Luc Brisson, Jacques Brunschwig, Gregory Vlastos, 2e éd. (Paris, 1998) 617–30. On the creative role of exegesis and its spiritual importance in ancient philosophy, see Pierre Hadot, “Philosophie, exégèse et contrasens,” and “Théologie, exégèse, révélation, Écriture dans la philosophie grecque,” in his collection of reprints: *Études de philosophie ancienne*, L’ane d’or (Paris, 1998) 3–11 and 27–58.

19. Plotinus himself may have been conscious of his unorthodoxy, see H.J. Blumenthal, *Aristotle and Neoplatonism in Late Antiquity: Interpretation of the De Anima* (London, 1996) 18; H.D. Saffrey, *Le Néoplatonisme après Plotin*, Histoire des doctrines de l’antiquité classique 24 (Paris, 2000) viii; G. Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, PA, 1996) 4–17 and R.M. Van den Berg, “Towards the Paternal Harbour: Proclean Theurgy and the Contemplation of the Forms,” in *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne* 425–42 at 425–26.

20. See W.J. Hankey, “Between and Beyond Augustine and Descartes: More than a Source of the Self,” *Augustinian Studies* 32.1 (2001): 65–88 at 74–85.

21. On Iamblichus, see M. Edwards, *Neoplatonic Saints, The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by their Students*, Translated Texts for Historians 35 (Liverpool, 2000) xxix; on Aquinas, Guillermo

Within this tradition, Syrianus reconciles Aristotelian abstraction and Platonic reminiscence, so that we come to self-knowledge and the knowledge of the divine by way of scientific ratiocination.²² Science, including metaphysics, becomes spiritual ascent, but it is also only a preparation. In his *Commentary on the First Alcibiades*, Proclus lists the conditions of self-knowledge. Philosophy is given a role comparable to that of purifications, rites of ablution and expiation in the Mysteries, so that "philosophy constitutes a preliminary purification and a preparation for self-knowledge and the immediate contemplation of our own essence."²³ This subordination is important, because by making philosophy an *ancilla*—not only of metaphysics as wisdom, but also of what the gods graciously reveal—something like the new pattern Thomas set up almost a millennium later vis-à-vis the Augustinians is anticipated.

The exercises of thirteenth-century Scholasticism, *lectio* and *disputatio*, which continue from the mediaeval into the modern university, are the methods of teaching and examination developed in the philosophical schools of Antiquity.²⁴ After Justinian's suppression of the philosophical schools, Neoplatonists like Simplicius, as well as their Byzantine Christian followers, and the Islamic philosophical heirs of them both, conveyed the Hellenic intellectual tradition through commentary on Aristotle. His works were less identified with the Neoplatonic religious programme than were Plato's. Crucially, the whole project presupposed that Plato and Aristotle had been reconciled.²⁵ In both the sixth and the thirteenth centuries, commentary, and the *disputatio* by which authorities were brought into accord, belonged to philosophy as a way of life. For the Academy under the "divine" Proclus, the complex curriculum, based above all in reconciling commentary, continuously reestablishing the authority of texts and of the tradition in which they were received, was the medium of a philosophical way of life which was

de Tocco, *Vita S. Thomas Aquinatis* c. xxxiii, 107, in *Fontes Vitae S. Thomae Aquinatis*, ed. D. Prümmer (Toulouse, 1911).

22. See de Libera, *La querelle* 103–09, and on Thomas' union of innatism, illumination, and abstraction, Houston Smit, "Aquinas's Abstractionism," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10 (2001): 85–118.

23. Proclus, *Sur le Premier Alcibiade de Platon*, texte établi et traduit par A. Ph. Segonds, tome 1 (Paris, 1985), prooemium 9, 7, lines 1–7; see W.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 (January 2003).

24. Pierre Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?* Collection Folio/Essais (Paris, 1995) 387.

25. G. Endress, "The New and Improved Platonic Theology. Proclus Arabus and Arabic Islamic Philosophy," in *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne* 553–70 at 556–58, Brisson, in *Philosophie grecque* 636, and 687–92.

equally and simultaneously religious. The learned commentator was also a divine mystagogue and theurge.²⁶ Sixth-century Neoplatonism and thirteenth-century Latin Scholasticism relate commentary, philosophy, and religion in analogous ways, even if the connection between them is not historically continuous.

Not only for both is philosophy contained within theology, and theology contained within religion, but also, for both centuries, its great teachers are priests and saints. In order to be doing philosophy as spiritual exercise belonging to a way of life, we need not engage directly in self-knowledge. In later Neoplatonism, self-knowledge and knowledge of the divine were by no means immediate; rather, they required philosophical propaedeutic not only by way of metaphysics, but also through physics and mathematics.²⁷ Dominic O'Meara has recently written about the deductions which comprise Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, modeled on the *Elements* of Euclid, under the significant title: "La science métaphysique (ou théologie) de Proclus comme exercice spirituel."²⁸ The soul comes to self-knowledge by such rigorous rationality because it is thus discovering *NOUS* within itself. Once immediate access to the divine *NOUS*, or *Verbum*, is no longer thought possible, we climb the spiritual *itinerarium* by the steps which order the complex of the sciences. Both Bonaventure's late *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*²⁹ and Thomas' early *Super Boetium De Trinitate* (1257–1259) teach this. Spiritual ascent includes and, at least for some, requires doing the sciences.

For Simplicius and Aquinas, the sciences are developed and are mediated through a complex textual tradition. To comment is to do the science.³⁰ For Aquinas and his predecessors, commentary combines philosophical judgment and critical historical investigation, while distinguishing them. 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 identifies the philo-

26. See Marc Lebiez, *Éloge d'un philosophe resté païen. Proclus (412–85), Ouverture philosophique* (Paris, 1998) and H.-D. Saffrey, "Quelques aspects de la spiritualité des philosophes néoplatoniciens de Jamblique à Proclus et Damascius," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 68.2 (1984): 169–82 [reprinted in H.D. Saffrey, *Recherches sur le Néoplatonisme après Plotin*, Histoire des doctrines de l'antiquité classique 14 (Paris, 1990) 213–26].

27 J.J. O'Cleary, "The Role of Mathematics in Proclus' Theology," in *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne* 65–90; Van den Berg, "Towards the Paternal," Ph. Hoffmann, "La triad Chaldaïque ΕΡΟΣ, ΑΛΗΘΕΙΑ, ΠΙΣΤΙΣ de Proclus à Simplicius," in *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne* 459–89 at 478–84.

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

29. Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, prologus 2.

30. See W.J. Hankey, "Why Philosophy Abides" 329–34.

sophical tradition to which the work being investigated belongs. The commentator analyses how the text stands to that tradition, sorting out what in the work is genuinely 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. As conciliator, the commentator also works out the relation between the traditions. I conclude this paper by examining explicitly recognised and acknowledged uses by Thomas of Simplicius' strategy for reconciling Plato and Aristotle, Platonist and Peripatetic, by making their approaches complementary.

III. AQUINAS WITHIN SIMPLICIUS' FRAMING OF THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

Thomas' *Quaestio Disputata de Spiritualibus Creaturis*, which scholars place in 1267–1268, is ascribed its date because it contains a quotation from Simplicius' *On the Categories* in the language of Moerbeke's translation. The passage which Aquinas reproduces provides a key to his treatment of the history of philosophy in his final years, a period in which his knowledge of that history increased dramatically in ways which required crucial changes in his judgments. As a result, at the very end of his writing, the *De Substantiis Separatis* of 1271 and his *De Caelo et Mundo Expositio*—itself placed between 1272 and 1273 because of its remarkable dependence on the *In de Caelo* of Simplicius—contain comparisons sorting out the contributions, opposition, concord, and complementarity of the two greatest philosophers, and of the Platonic and Peripatetic schools. In what follows (A) I shall list the most important changes or developments in Thomas' knowledge and judgments, before coming to (B) the key quotation from Simplicius, and then moving to sketches of the reconciling comparisons, (C) in the *De Substantiis Separatis*, and (D) in the *De Caelo et Mundo Expositio*.

III. (A) Changes in Thomas' Knowledge and Judgments about the History of Philosophy

The most important changes result from another translation by the great Moerbeke, i.e., that of the *Elements of Theology* of Proclus, completed on 18 May 1268. Thomas' reading of the *Elements* has many consequences; I shall list three: (1) first, Thomas no longer regards the *Liber de causis* as by Aristotle, instead he writes:

It seems that someone from among the Arabic philosophers excerpted this from the *Elements* of Proclus, especially since everything contained in this book is found more fully and diffusely in that of Proclus.³¹

31. Aquinas, *Super Librum De Causis Expositio*, ed. H.-D. Saffrey, *Textus Philosophici Friburgenses 4/5* (Fribourg/Louvain, 1954) proemium 3, lines 7–10.

This reassignment of authorship must have changed his view of Aristotle as well as of the *Liber*, and Thomas worked out the implications in following years. We tend to forget that, although philosophy is *ancilla* and *praeambula* to *sacra doctrina* for Aquinas, this did not mean that his study of philosophy came earlier in time; commenting on the works of Aristotle was not a preliminary exercise belonging to Thomas' early years. Almost all of the twelve Aristotelian commentaries were undertaken in the last six years of Thomas' writing, and five were left unfinished.³² Revised translations of Aristotle's texts used by Thomas for many of these were made by William. Although R.-A. Gauthier has helped destroy the myth that they were done for Aquinas,³³ he rightly insists on the enormous importance of Moerbeke's texts for the quality of Thomas' commentaries. For our purposes, it is important to insist on Gauthier's words; Moerbeke's translations of the Greek commentators were more important for the special quality of Thomas' expositions than were his translations of Aristotle:

St. Thomas, as commentator on Aristotle is above all indebted to William of Moerbeke for his translations of the Greek commentators: the translations of the commentaries of Themistius on the *De Anima*, of Alexander of Aphrodisias on the *De Sensu*, of Ammonias on the *Peryermenias*, of Simplicius on the *De celo*, judiciously used, have given the commentaries of Saint Thomas a new dimension.³⁴

Aquinas is now well established back beyond the Arabic philosophers and commentators in the traditions and works out of which their understanding of Plato and Aristotle emerged. He is conscious of the value of the Greek commentaries and paraphrases, and uses them to free himself from his temporally nearer predecessors in the Platonic and Peripatetic traditions.

(2) Second, there is equally a new understanding of Platonism, of its complexity and history. This comes out in Thomas' very sophisticated *Super Librum De Causis Expositio*. There Thomas elaborates and compares the Platonic positions in a manner which is clearly dependent on Neoplatonic sources, principally, though by no means exclusively: Augustine, pseudo-

32. I. Aertsen, "Aquinas's Philosophy in its Historical Setting," *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. N. Kretzmann and E. Stump (Cambridge, 1993) 20; M.D. Jordan, *The Alleged Aristotelianism of Thomas Aquinas*, The Etienne Gilson Series 15 (Toronto, 1992) 9-10. For principles by which we date them, see R.-A. Gauthier in Aquinas, *Expositio Libri Peryermenias*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Editio altera retractata, Commissio Leonina: vol. 1, 1 (Rome, 1989) 85*-88*.

33. See Torrell, *Initiation à saint Thomas d'Aquin* 253-58.

34. R.-A. Gauthier in Aquinas, *Expositio Libri Posteriorum*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Editio altera retractata, Commissio Leonina: vol. 1, 2 (Rome, 1989) 55*.

Dionysius, the *Liber*, and, now, the *Elements of Theology*.³⁵ Comparing the *Liber*, the Dionysian *corpus*, and the *Elements*, as he did explicitly in his exposition of the *Liber*,³⁶ enabled Aquinas to view simultaneously works of Hellenic, Arabic, and Christian Neoplatonism. Crucially, for the first time, he knew that all three were Platonic. This brings us to the third shift in his judgements.

(3) For most of his intellectual activity, Aquinas had thought the Dionysian *corpus* had an Aristotelian character. In part, this would have derived from his acceptance of the *Liber* as Aristotle's, because he recognised the remarkable similarities between these Christian and Islamic theologies, dating from about the same time and both dependent on Proclus: indeed, he even suggests that the author of the *Liber* is dependent on Dionysius.³⁷ In his *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, the fruit of his first teaching in Paris (1252–1254), Thomas judged *Dionysius autem fere ubique sequitur Aristotelem, ut patet diligenter inspicienti libros eius*.³⁸ However, by the time he wrote his *Expositio super librum De divinis nominibus* (sometime between 1265 and 1268), he had discerned that the style and *modo loquendi* of Dionysius were those used by the *Platonici*.³⁹ When later (probably about 1272), he wrote the last question of his *Quaestiones Disputatae De Malo*, he was definite about the philosophical allegiance of the Areopagite: *Dionysius qui in plurimis fuit sectator sententiae Platonice*.⁴⁰ Dionysius was now within the same

35. See W.J. Hankey, "Aquinas and the Platonists," for *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages—A Doxographic Approach*, ed. Maarten J.F.M. Hoenen and Stephen Gersh (Berlin, 2002) 279–324.

36. Saffrey, *Super De causis* xxxvi: "Saint Thomas, lorsqu'il commentait le *Liber de Causis*, avit trois livres ouverts devant lui: le texte du *Liber*, un manuscrit de l'*Elementatio* et un *corpus* dionysien."

37. Aquinas, *Super De causis* 4, 33, lines 11–12: *supra dictum est secundum sententiam DIONYSII, quam videtur sequi AUCTOR huius libri*.

38. Aquinas, *In Quatuor Libros Sententiarum*, vol. 1 (of 8), *S. Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia*, ed. R. Buser (Stuttgart, 1980) lib. 2, dist. 14, quest. 1, art. 2, 164. A consideration of the fundamental reasons for this apparently strange association is Edward Booth, *Aristotelian Aporetic Ontology in Islamic and Christian Thinkers*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought III, 20 (Cambridge, 1983). On his assimilation of Dionysius and Aristotle, see also F. O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas*, Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 32 (Leiden, 1992) 83–105 and W.J. Hankey, "Dionysian Hierarchy in St. Thomas Aquinas: Tradition and Transformation," *Denys l'Aréopagite et sa postérité en Orient et en Occident, Actes du Colloque International Paris, 21–24 septembre 1994*, éd. Ysabel de Andia, Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 151 (Paris, 1997) 422 ff.

39. Aquinas, *In librum Beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio*, ed. C. Pera (Turin/Rome, 1950) proemium § 2, 1.

40. Aquinas, *De Malo* 16.1 ad 3, 283, lines 389–90.

philosophical tradition where Thomas had long placed Augustine (e.g., *Augustinus autem, Platonem secutus quantum fides catholica patiebatur*).⁴¹ Regrettably, Thomas does not explain how he accounts for the differences in their epistemologies, because he can be in no doubt that Augustine follows the *via Platonicorum, ex rationibus intelligibilibus*, and Dionysius the *via Aristotelica, ex rebus sensibilibus*.

(4) To another development Simplicius also made a contribution which we have noted already. In his polemical treatise *On the Unity of the Intellect against Parisian Averroism* of 1270, and in others of his last works, Aquinas employs methods which Alain de Libera has shown to involve both the philosophical construction and deconstruction of the position of his adversaries, and also sophisticated historical criticism in respect to philosophical traditions.⁴² 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 and whom he characterises as Averroist.⁴³

In the treatise Thomas tells us that he will show the position of these contemporary Latin philosophers to be “no less against the principles of philosophy than against the documents of faith.” Moreover, their doctrine is opposed to the words and opinion of Aristotle, the *institutor* of the Peripatetic school to which they claim to belong. Thomas traces the history of the teaching in the Peripatetic school about the unity or multiplication of the intellect—whether there is one for all humans, or whether, instead, it is multiplied according to the number of human souls. 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.”⁴⁴ This judgment was possible in great part because Aquinas had already worked out what he took to be the position of Aristotle

41. Aquinas, *Quaestio Disputata de Spiritualibus Creaturis*, ed. J. Cos, Commissio Leonina: vol. 24, 2 (Rome/Paris, 2000) 10 ad 8, 113, lines 515–16.

42. De Libera, in d’Aquin, *L’Unité de l’intellect contre les Averroïstes 72–73*; idem, “Albert le Grand et Thomas d’Aquin interprètes du *Liber de Causis*,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 74 (1990): 347–78.

43. On the significance of Thomas’ entrance into the disputes with Faculty of Arts, the site of philosophy, see Hankey, “Why Philosophy Abides,” *passim*; Alain de Libera, *Penser au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1991); Ruedi Imbach, *Dante, la philosophie et les laïcs*, Initiations à la philosophie médiévale (Paris/Fribourg, 1996), and F.-X. Putallaz, R. Imbach, *Profession philosophe: Siger de Brabant*, Initiations au Moyen Âge (Paris, 1997).

44. Aquinas, *De Unitate Intellectus contra Averroistas*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Commissio Leonina: vol. 43 (Rome, 1976) 1, 291, lines 29–38.

when he wrote his exposition of the *De Anima* between the end of 1267 and September 1268. For this he employed a revised translation of Aristotle's text by Moerbeke, his translation of the paraphrase of Themistius, and his translation of the *In Praedicamenta* of Simplicius.⁴⁵ Moerbeke enabled the Arabic Peripatetics and their disciples to be confuted by their Greek predecessors.

III. (B) *Simplicius and Aquinas on How Plato and Aristotle Differ*

With this background, we are ready to turn to the *Disputed Question on Spiritual Creatures*, written at the same time as the *Sententia libri De Anima*, and to its quotation from Simplicius' *On the Categories*. According to Aquinas and Simplicius, with Aristotle and the Platonists we have two opposed philosophical procedures 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*.⁴⁶

To put it in Thomas' technical language: the *via Platonicorum* begins and proceeds *ex rationibus intelligibilibus*, and thus thinks in terms of the inherent independence of the separate substances. For Thomas, although 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*.

When Thomas treats the history of philosophy, he distinguishes the arguments of philosophers, which he calls *viae*, and their conclusions, i.e., what are established as a result of the arguments. *Ratio* and *via* are used interchangeably and make intelligible the conclusions which are "commanded and imposed by the *via*."⁴⁷ This pattern is frequent in his exposition of the

45. R.-A. Gauthier in Aquinas, *Sententia libri De Anima*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Commissio Leonina: vol. 45.1 (Rome/Paris, 1984) 283*-87*.

46. Aquinas, *de Spiritualibus Creaturis* 3, 40, lines 275-82: *Harum autem duarum opinionum diuersitas ex hoc procedit quod quidam ad inquirendam ueritatem de natura rerum processerunt ex rationibus intelligibilibus: et hoc fuit proprium Platonicorum, quidam uero ex rebus sensibilibus: et hoc fuit proprium philosophie Aristotelis, ut dicit Simplicius in Commento super Praedicamenta*. Aquinas is referring to Simplicius, *In Praedicamenta Aristotelis*, Prologus (Patin: vol. 1, prologus) 8, line 70-9, line 85. There are several reconciliations of Plato and Aristotle in the prologue based on their different modes of speaking.

47. R.J. Henle, *Saint Thomas and Platonism. A Study of the Plato and Platonic Texts in the Writings of Saint Thomas* (The Hague, 1956) 295.

Liber de Causis and in the treatise *On Separate Substances*.⁴⁸ The first chapters of the latter, which constitute extended treatments of the history of philosophy with lists of differences and agreements between Plato and Aristotle, employ this structure.⁴⁹ However, Aquinas is interested in more than the relation between a particular argument and the conclusion at which it arrives. He wishes to understand the philosophical schools: their characters, the differences between them and within them, their memberships, influences, histories, and the extent to which they are complementary and may be brought into concord.

A distinct philosophical school is constituted by proceeding according to a characteristic *via*. Along with the rest of medieval Latins, Thomas knows almost none of the dialogues of Plato, nonetheless, he comes to distinguish the opinions of Plato and *alii Platonici*, and he is clear that there are differences within the philosophical schools. Still, “no text, however, points to a difference in the *via*.”⁵⁰ Thus, what Thomas reproduces from Simplicius’ *On the Categories* enables him to establish a mutual characterization of Platonism and Aristotelianism occurring within a schematized progressive history set up in terms of simple oppositions. Its assumption is the ultimate reconcilability of the two schools. This history, and the relation between the two schools, the *De Substantiis Separatis* gives.

III. (c) *The Concordance and Complementarity of Platonism and Aristotelianism in the De Substantiis Separatis*

(1) PLATO AND THE PLATONISTS. The history of philosophy in the *De Substantiis Separatis* begins *De opinionibus antiquorum et Platonis*. Plato “proceeded by a more adequate way to refute the position of the early Physicists.” Because of the continuous flux of bodies and the deception of the senses, they had thought it impossible for humans “to know the certain truth of things (*certam rerum veritatem sciri*).”⁵¹ Plato, agreeing with them “that sensible things are always in flux (*quod sensibilia semper in fluxu*),” and “that the sensitive power does not have certain judgment about reality (*certum iudicium de rebus*),”⁵² solved the problem of knowledge by “positing natures separated from the matter of the fluctuating things (*naturas a materia*

48. *Ibid.*, 183–95 and see Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes* [*Super Librum De Causis Expositio*], translated and annotated by V.A. Guagliardo, C.R. Hess, R.C. Taylor, introduction by V.A. Guagliardo (Washington, 1996) xxiv.

49. Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Commissio Leonina: vol. 60, D (Rome, 1968) 1–4, D41–D47.

50. Henle, *Saint Thomas* 447, notes 3 and 4.

51. Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis* 1, D 42, lines 66–70.

52. Aquinas, *De Spiritualibus Creaturis* 10 ad 8, 112, lines 505–10.

fluxibilia rerum separatas) in which the truth would be fixed (*veritas fixa*).” By adhering to these our soul would know the truth.”

Thus, according to this reasoning, because the intellect when knowing the truth apprehends something beyond the matter of sensible things, Plato thought some things existed separated from sensible things.⁵³

For Aquinas, Plato's work is an essential part of a successful history of philosophical progress.

Philosophy begins with two errors which must be overcome. One is the denial that humans can know with certainty. The second is that nothing exists separate from bodies. Theology requires that both errors be overcome. God is a separate substance, even though the human way of knowing makes it difficult for us to understand this. Without certain knowledge, 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.⁵⁴ As a result of true philosophical demonstrations, Thomas can assert in the *De Veritate*: “we discover that God exists, by unbreakable reasons proved by the philosophers (*rationibus irrefragabilibus etiam a philosophis probatum*).”⁵⁵

Plato solves both errors, solves them together, and his solution is correct insofar as they can only be solved together. However, the connection between knowledge of the truth and the existence of separate substances is not what Plato takes it to be. In order to save knowledge, Plato simply reversed the Physicists, solving the problem too immediately. Plato projected what belongs to our thinking onto an external reality. In common with the Physicists, Plato held that like was known by like (*simile simili cognoscitur*). The Physicists, thinking that nothing except bodies existed, determined the knower from the known: “they thought that the form of the object known should be in the knower in the same way that it is in the thing known.”⁵⁶

The *Platonici*, however, laid down the contrary. For Plato, having perceived that the intellectual soul is immaterial and knows immaterially, held that the forms of things known exist immaterially (*formas rerum cognitarum immaterialiter subsistere*).

53. Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis* 1, D 42, lines 75–79: *unde secundum hoc quod intellectus veritatem cognoscens aliqua seorsum apprehendit praeter materiam sensibilia rerum, sic aestimavit esse aliqua a sensibilibus separata.*

54. Aquinas, *ST* 1.2.2 sed contra.

55. *Quaestiones Disputatae de Veritate*, ed. R.M. Spiazzi (Turin/Rome, 1964) 10.12; see also 14.9 resp. and ad 9.

56. Aquinas, *ST* 1.84.2 resp.: *Existimabant autem quod forma cogniti sit in cognoscente eo modo quo est in re cognita.*

This move against the Physicists is correct because a reversal is required: “the nature of knowledge is opposite to the nature of materiality (*ratio cognitionis ex oppositio se habet ad rationem materialitatis*).”⁵⁷ However, by simply changing the direction of the likeness, so that the structure of knowledge is transferred to reality, Plato remains too close to his adversaries. Certainly, truth requires a likeness of knower and known, but this is only one side of the matter. From Boethius, Thomas learned very early that cognition should be considered according to *duplex modus*, as he puts it in his commentary on the *Sentences*: “namely, the mode of the thing known and the mode of the knower, the mode of the thing known is not the mode of the knower, as Boethius says.”⁵⁸ Knower and known must be deeply distinguished.

Thomas’ history quickly becomes more complicated. By comparing the *Liber de causis* with *The Elements of Theology*, Thomas arrives at a full picture of the many levels of *intelligibilia* and intellects in the Platonic spiritual cosmos. In expounding the *Liber de causis*, and in the *De Substantiis Separatis*, as well as in earlier works,⁵⁹ Thomas notes that the *Platonici* posited orders of separate forms upon which intellects depended. In the *De Substantiis Separatis*, he represents Plato as positing two *genera* of entities abstracted from sensible things in accord with two modes of intellectual abstraction: “mathematicals and universals which he called forms or ideas (*mathematica et universalia quae species sive ideas nominabat*).” (Because, for Aquinas, whatever Plato may have supposed, all our knowledge begins from sense, these must be abstractions, on this more below. As we shall see, the view that all our knowledge really begins from the sensible was shared by Simplicius, and by the post-Porphyrrian Neoplatonism of which he is an heir.)⁶⁰

Plato is represented as establishing a hierarchy in which mathematical are intermediate between the forms and sensibles (*media inter species seu ideas et sensibilia*).⁶¹ At the highest level were entities like the good itself, intellect itself and life itself. Aquinas judged that, in this case, the Platonic error in solving the epistemological dilemma involved a false separation of the object from the subject of intellection. The *intelligibilia* were separated

57. *Ibid.*

58. Aquinas, *In Sententiarum*, lib. 1, dist. 38, quest. 1, art. 2, resp. See Aquinas, *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, ed. Fratrum Praedicatorum, Commissio Leonina: vol. 50 (Rome/Paris, 1992) *Expositio Capituli Secundi*, 133, line 16–134, line 52, and Hankey, “*Secundum rei vim*” *passim*.

59. Aquinas, *In De divinis nominibus*, 4.1 § 276, 88: *Platonici in substantiis separatis distinguerunt intelligibilia ab intellectualibus*.

60. Smit, “Aquinas’s Abstractionism” shows that there is also a reconciliation with Augustinian innatism and illuminationism; in fact, this reconciliation belongs to the later Neoplatonism and the Arabic Peripatetics of whom Aquinas is an heir.

61. Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis* 1, D 42, lines 94–104.

from the intellects when the "gods, which is what Plato called the separate intelligible forms (*deos dicebat esse species intelligibiles separatas*)," were separated from knowing.⁶² The "order of gods, that is of ideal forms (*formarum idealium*) has an order among itself corresponding to the order of the universality of forms."⁶³ The philosophical error involved in this separation of subject and object evidently has religious consequences. Thus, in this aspect of his teaching on the kinds of separate substances, Aristotle's parsimony is "more consonant with the Christian faith." Aristotle does not need separate forms to explain how we know and "we do not posit other separate forms above the order of intellectual beings (*alias formas separatas supra intellectuum ordinem*)." God himself contains all these formal perfections, and there is no order intermediate between him and knowing beings.⁶⁴ Crucially, however, as we shall see, the Platonic tendency to multiply entities also benefits the truth.

(2) ARISTOTLE AND THE PERIPATETICS. When, in the second chapter of the *De Substantiis Separatis*, Thomas comes to *De Opinione Aristotilis*, in a statement which echoes what he found in Simplicius *Upon the Categories*, and matches what he writes of the first of the *quinque viae* in the *Summa Theologiae*, he judges that Aristotle's way of reasoning, *per viam motus*, to the existence of separate substances is *manifestior et certior*.⁶⁵ Simplicius had also judged the Aristotelian way to have a more persuasive necessity in virtue of its relation to sense,⁶⁶ and as we shall see below, in the conclusion to his commentary on the *Physics* assimilates Plato's way to it. It is essential to this "way of motion" that it starts with sensibly known corporeal existence, the knowing for which Aquinas judges us to be naturally suited. There is, however, a deficiency in Aristotle's *alia via*.

What is defective in his way matches its virtue. His staying "with what does not depart much from what is evident to sense" gives a greater certainty to our rational knowledge of the existence of separate substances. It shows its limits, however, when determining their kinds and numbers. On this, Aristotle's position seems "less sufficient than the position of Plato (*minus sufficiens*)." ⁶⁷ Aristotle wants only "a dual order of separate substances, namely, the separate substances which are the ends of the heavenly motions [moving

62. *Ibid.* 4, D 47, lines 3–19.

63. Aquinas, *Super De causis* prop. 19, 106, lines 5–7.

64. *Ibid.*, prop. 10, 67, line 19–68, line 7. He makes much the same point at prop. 13, 83, lines 8–17.

65. Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis* 2, D 44, lines 11–13. Compare *ST* 1.2.3 resp.: *Prima autem et manifestior via est, quae sumitur ex parte motus. Certum est enim et sensu constat aliqua moveri in hoc mundo.*

66. Simplicius, *Commentaire sur les Catégories*, prologus, 8, line 74–9, line 79.

67. Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis* 2, D 45, lines 97–100.

the others because desired by them] and the souls (*animae*) of the spheres, which move through appetite and desire," and ties their numbers to those necessary to move the heavens.⁶⁸

(3) COMPARING THE SCHOOLS. (I) ON THE KINDS OF SEPARATE SUBSTANCES. As against these Aristotelian opinions, Thomas asserts that the phenomena associated with demon possession and magic "can in no way be reduced to a corporeal cause (*nullo modo possunt in causam corporalem reduci*)." These phenomena require the kind of explanation "through some intellectual substances" which Thomas associates with the Platonists.⁶⁹ He is against a reduction of the phenomena to "the power of the heavenly bodies and of other natural things (*ex virtute celestium corporum et aliarum naturalium rerum*)." He sides with Augustine, and with Plotinus and the Platonists (as represented by Augustine and many others), in asserting the existence of demons which lie outside what he takes as Aristotle's two-fold order of separated substances. Thomas understands the position he opposes to be what was held by *Perypathetici Aristotilis secutores*.⁷⁰

Nonetheless, even on this matter Aristotle is partly right. While the Platonic multiplication of separate substances enables them to discover the demons intermediate between intellects and human, it also draws them to posit intermediates where they do not exist. The result is the problem in respect of kinds which we have already identified. In the view of Aquinas, there is agreement between Aristotle, Dionysius, Augustine, and the author of the *Liber* that no *intelligibilia* are intermediate between God and the subordinate noetic beings,⁷¹ although he recognises that Dionysius is somewhat ambiguous on this.⁷² However, the Aristotelians are not the only party to err about the numbers of the separated substances; on this the Platonists are also at fault.

(II) ON THE NUMBERS OF SEPARATE SUBSTANCES. The first error of the Platonists we considered in respect to the numbers of separate substances involved a faulty Platonic multiplication. The cause was the Platonic false separation of the object and the subject of understanding. The result was that beings (ultimately gods, in Aquinas' judgment) were posited, holding an intermediate place between intellects and the First Principle. Their second error involves the number of these separated ideas or forms.

68. *Ibid.*, D 44, line 88–D 45, line 96.

69. *Ibid.* lines 103–18.

70. Aquinas, *De Malo* 16.1 resp., 282, lines 285–305.

71. Aquinas, *Super De causis* prop. 10, 67, line 19–68, line 21.

72. Aquinas, *In De divinis nominibus* 5.1 § 634, 235: *Dionysius autem in aliquo eis [Platonici] consentit et in aliquo dissentit: consentit eis in hoc point vitam separatam per se existentem et similiter sapientiam et esse et alia huiusmodis; dissentit autem ab eis in hoc quod ista principia separata non dicit esse diversa, sed unum principium, quod est Deus.*

Despite the beginning from intelligible reasons, which they supposed themselves to have made, ultimately the Platonists could not escape determining the numbers of the separated intelligible forms from sensible things. For Aquinas, in the tradition of the same understanding of the place and orientation of the human individual soul to which Simplicius also adheres, reason has, in fact, no other real beginning of its knowing except from the sensible. In consequence, the Platonists do not avoid reproducing the sensible world in the intelligible realm: "For, since they are not able to arrive at knowledge of such substances except from sensible things, they supposed the former to be of the same species as the latter, indeed, better, to be their species (*magis species istarum*)."⁷³ The kinds of sensible things determined the numbers of the separated universals. That the lower should dictate the kinds or numbers of the higher is always repugnant to Aquinas, and he also criticises Aristotle for a like reversal in the order of reasons.

After this criticism of the principles by which the Platonists multiply the separate substances, Thomas goes on in the *De Substantiis Separatis* to attack Aristotle's parsimony in respect to their number. The problem with the Aristotelian argument on this point is at base the same problem as with what determines for him how many kinds of separate substances there are. Thus, as with the Platonists, all the errors inhere in what is faulty in the *via*. This time, however, we are dealing with Aristotle's own writings not those of the *secatores*, and we come directly up against what is essential to his way, i.e., *per viam motus*. Reasoning thus, Aristotle makes a mistake which Aquinas now shows to be unnecessary according to his own principles. Indeed Thomas turns Aristotle against himself by means of "his own procedure and very words (*ipse processus, ipsa verba*)"⁷⁴—Aquinas must see this as a just retribution given the literal interpretation he and Simplicius discern Aristotle and his followers to have imposed on the words of Plato! Because, for Aristotle, every heavenly motion must have a reason, the Philosopher deduces the number of the immaterial substances from the number of the heavenly motions. In the judgment of Aquinas, reasoning after this manner makes the higher serve the lower, and, as a result, gets the purposes of things wrong.⁷⁵

It is more probable that between the first immaterial substance and the heavenly body there would be many orders of immaterial substances, of which the inferior are ordered to the higher in respect to end, and the heavenly body is ordered to the lowest (*infimam*) of these, insofar as its proximate end is concerned.⁷⁶

73. Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* 2.92 § 1791.

74. Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis* 2, D 45, lines 149–50.

75. He makes these same arguments in ST 1.50.3 ad 3.

76. Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis* 2, D 45, lines 168–73.

Provided that they do not make the false separation of *intelligibilia ab intellectualibus*, and commit the errors which follow, Plato and his followers are right as against Aristotle. In principle, the *Platonici* correctly look at separated substances and the whole order of thinking beings for their own sakes (*ipsam naturam rerum secundum se considerans*),⁷⁷ and in relation to the First Principle rather than from below. The problems which remain for the Platonists about the number of the separated substances involve a conflict between the *Platonici* and Dionysius from within this proper way of thinking about them. On the one hand, there is the greater simplicity of the superior (a Platonic principle), which would seem to require that there be fewer higher than lower beings. On the other hand, there is the Dionysian principle that there must be more of what is best in the cosmos. This time, Thomas wants to "save" both sides in an argument between Neoplatonists. The *ratio Platoniorum* is *saluatur quantum ad numerum ordinem*.⁷⁸ The *dictum Dionysii*, is *saluatur*, together with the Platonic simplicity at either end of the cosmos, because, though there are fewer highest kinds, the numbers within each of the higher ranks are immensely greater than in the inferior ranks.⁷⁹

It should now be clear how Thomas writes the history, drawing the Platonists and the Aristotelians into a single argument by which they complement and correct each other. The principle of this correction is the Christian faith, which philosophy ultimately serves.

(III) THE ACCORD OF PLATO AND ARISTOTLE ON CREATION. According to the *Treatise on Separate Substances*, Plato and Aristotle are also in accord on great truths like the creation of all things by a single First Principle.⁸⁰ Thomas reports that:

Secundum sententiam Platonis et Aristotilis It is necessary, therefore, beyond the mode of coming to be, by which something becomes by the coming of form to matter [this doctrine he ascribed to the *Naturales*], to presuppose another origin of things, according as *esse* is bestowed on the whole universe of things (*toti universitati rerum*) by a first being which is its own being (*a primo ente quod est suum esse*).⁸¹

77. *Ibid.* 4, D 47, lines 31–35.

78. Aquinas, *ST* 1.112.4 ad 2.

79. Aquinas, *De Spiritualibus Creaturis* 8 ad 10, 85, lines 448–456.

80. Thomas' views on Plato in this regard change, see L. Dewan, "St. Thomas, Aristotle, and Creation," *Dionysius* 15 (1991): 81–90; M.F. Johnson, "Did St. Thomas Attribute a Doctrine of Creation to Aristotle?" *New Scholasticism* 63 (1989): 129–55; idem, "Aquinas' Changing Evaluation of Plato on Creation," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 66.1 (1992): 81–88.

81. Aquinas, *De Substantiis Separatis* 9, D 57, lines 103–18.

It ought not to be thought, because Plato and Aristotle held immaterial substances and the heavenly bodies to have existed always, that “they denied to them a cause of their being (*causam essendi*).” They did not deviate from the Catholic faith by positing *increated*.⁸² Here, in the *De Substantiis Separatis*, the doctrine that God is the solitary cause of being for all things is stated in a form which sounds more Platonic than Aristotelian. The First Principle is called *simplicissimum*, and Thomas argues that “because subsistent being (*esse subsistens*) must be one ... it is necessary that all other things which are under it exist in the way they do as participants in *esse* (*omnia alia quae sub ipso sunt sic esse quasi esse participantia*).”⁸³ His exposition of the *Liber de causis* shows that, having looked at Plato more and more in Neoplatonic terms, Thomas saw that for Platonists all is derived from one exalted First Principle. Even if the Platonists “posited many gods ordered under one” rather than, as we do, “positing one only having all things in itself,” everyone agrees “universality of causality belongs to God (*universalitas ... causalitatis propria est Deo*).”⁸⁴

The Platonic language betrays the source of this doctrine. The notion that Aristotle taught a doctrine of creation was developed among the late Antique conciliators of Plato and Aristotle. The Platonists want to draw together the pagan *Genesis*, the *Timaeus*,⁸⁵ and its “Demiurge” with Aristotle’s *Physics* and his Unmoved Mover. To do this they needed to find some way of reconciling Aristotle’s eternal universe with that in the *Timaeus*, which is, as Aquinas discerned,⁸⁶ generated and corruptible, though perpetual because it is held in being by the divine will.⁸⁷ The efforts and diverse positions of Alexander of Aphrodisias, Ammonius, Boethius, Proclus (to name only those whose texts and positions on this question are known in some measure to Aquinas) give the background to the pervasive notion in late Antiquity and the Middle Ages that Aristotle and Plato regarded the First Principle as a creator. Prominent among these concordists is Simplicius. In his commentary on the eighth book of Aristotle’s *Physics*, we find a detailed reconcilia-

82. Ibid. D 58, lines 215–20.

83. Ibid. D 57, lines 103–10.

84. Aquinas, *Super De causis* prop. 19, 106, lines 13–17.

85. See P. Hadot, “Physique et poésie dans le *Timée* de Platon,” in idem, *Études de philosophie ancienne*, L’ane d’or (Paris, 1998) 277.

86. Aquinas, *In De Caelo* 1.23 § 236, 113; 1.29 § 283, 138.

87. See R. Sorabji, “Infinite Power Impressed: The Transformation of Aristotle’s *Physics* and Theology,” K. Verrycken, “The *Metaphysics* of Ammonius Son of Hermeias,” and idem, “The Development of Philoponus’ Thought and its Chronology,” in *Aristotle Transformed. The Ancient Commentators and their Influence*, ed. R. Sorabji (Ithaca, 1990) 181–98; 199–231; 233–74, respectively. Most recently and importantly, there is Proclus, *On the Eternity of the World, De Aeternitate Mundi*, Greek text with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary by Helen S. Lang and A.D. Macro (Berkeley, 2002), which shows the concordance of Plato, Aristotle, and

tion of Plato and Aristotle.⁸⁸ Its beginning indicates the character of the rest and shows that, if Aristotle is Platonised in this reconciliation, Plato is every bit as much Aristotelianised:

The truly marvellous Aristotle brings his instruction about the principles of nature to culmination in theology, which is above nature, and proves that the entire corporeal structure of nature is dependent on the incorporeal intellective goodness that is above nature and unrelated—here too following Plato. But it was from the very existence of the body of the world that Plato discovered the intellective god who is the creator of the world ... Aristotle too proceeds from motion and change and from the subsistence of bodies, which is finite and has extension, to the unmoved, unchangeable, unintermittent cause.⁸⁹

Note the "Aristotle too proceeds from motion and change and from the subsistence of bodies;" for Simplicius (and Aquinas), in the end Plato must be understood as beginning "from the very existence of the body of the world" and Aristotle follows him. The *viae* are assimilated. Near the end of this section of his commentary, when he is showing how both Plato and Aristotle teach god to be the efficient as well as the final cause of all creation, Simplicius reveals one of his sources:

My teacher Ammonius has written an entire book that provides many proofs of the fact that Aristotle considers god to be also the efficient cause of the entire world, and I have here taken over some points sufficiently for my present purposes.⁹⁰

Simplicius' *Physics Commentary* could only have been a remote source for Thomas' drawing Aristotle and Plato together on creation—Aquinas did not have it and there is no evidence that it was translated into Arabic.⁹¹ Nonetheless, when Thomas follows him in commenting on the eighth book of the *Physics*, we find a like conciliation and this judgment: "Plato and Aristotle arrived at the knowledge of the principle of all being ... the universal production of all being from the first principle of being (*productionem*

the Stoics in the Platonic tradition, but also demonstrates that the dispute about the eternity of the world is internal to late ancient philosophical theology generally and is not a dispute between pagans and Christians.

88. See Simplicius, *On Aristotle's "Physics 8.6–10,"* 1359,5–1363,24, 149–54.

89. Ibid. 1359,5–1359,10, 149.

90. Ibid. 1363,8–1363,12, 153. Thomas possessed a commentary by Ammonius; see *Commentaire sur le Peri Hermeneias d'Aristote. Traduction de Guillaume de Moerbeke, édition critique et étude sur l'utilisation du Commentaire dans l'oeuvre de saint Thomas* par G. Verbeke, *Corpus Latinum Commentariorum in Aristotelem Graecorum 2* (Louvain/Paris, 1961) finished by Moerbeke on 12 September 1268.

91. P. Lettinck, *Aristotle's Physics and its Reception in the Arabic World*, Brill *Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus 7* (Leiden, 1994) 2–3.

universalem totius esse a primo essendi principio).⁹² These are Thomas' last words on this subject.

III. (D) *Simplicius and Aquinas on Peripatetic and Platonic Hermeneutic in their Commentaries on the De Caelo et Mundo*

Thomas owes a great deal more to Simplicius; I conclude with another instance especially connected to the question we are considering. Under his guidance, Aquinas 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.⁹³ 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.

Thomas agrees that Aristotle is a literalist. Plato speaks like the theologians who "hand on divine things poetically and in stories."⁹⁴ Thomas tells us in his *Commentary on the De Anima* that 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*.⁹⁵ Among the possible sources for these characterizations, Gauthier rightly gives the prologue of the *In Praedicamenta* of Simplicius.⁹⁶ Thomas' last commentaries on Aristotle make this distinction repeatedly and he explicitly cites "Simplicius in commento Praedicamentorum."⁹⁷

After following Simplicius on the character of the traditions, Thomas reports judgments. Some of the interpreters, Simplicius in particular, say

92. Aquinas, *In Octo Libros Physicorum Aristotelis Expositio*, ed. P.M. Maggiolo (Turin/Rome, 1965) 8.2, § 975, 506.

93. Jordan, "Alleged" 11–14.

94. Aquinas, *In De Caelo* 1.22 § 227.

95. Aquinas, *Sententia libri de Anima* 8, 38, lines 3–9.

96. See Simplicius, *Commentaire sur les Catégories d'Aristote* prol., vol. 1, 9, lines 83–85: *Non solum vero neque fabulis neque symbolicis enigmatibus, sicut quidam eorum qui fuerunt anti ipsum, Aristoteles usus fuit, sed pro omni alio velamine obscuritatem praeponderavit. & lines 87ff.: antiquioribus enim putantibus non oportere corariis suam sapientiam proponere ad hoc quod eam susciperent sine labore propter praeclucidam explanationem, hi quidem fabulis, hi autem symbolis ipsam absconderunt, quemadmodum velaminibus magis abdita sacrorum. Aristoteles autem obscuritatem praeponderavit*

97. Aquinas, *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Expositio*, ed. M.R. Cathala and R.M. Spiazzi (Turin/Rome, 1964) 3.11 § 468, 131 and see *In Physicorum* 1.15 § 138, 68.

that “these poets and philosophers, and principally Plato” ought not to be understood “according to the superficial signification of their words, but in accord with the *sapientia* which these writers wished to hide under their stories and aenigmatic speech.”⁹⁸ 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, were confronted, agreement would be found.⁹⁹ In contrast to the approach of Simplicius, Alexander of Aphrodisias was perhaps even more severe than his master. 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.¹⁰⁰

How important are these differences about how we ought to interpret our philosophic predecessors? Indeed, how important is philosophical doxology? Ultimately, it is not decisive, Thomas judges. He opines that 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*).¹⁰¹ Does Thomas therefore suppose himself to stand above human perspectives and interpretative traditions? Is Aquinas, as some suppose, separating himself from Simplicius and the tradition of commentary when he sides with the truth as against human opinion.¹⁰²

An examination of Moerbeke’s translation of Simplicius’ *Commentaria in de celo* used by Aquinas reveals the contrary. In fact, Simplicius had made the same point as Thomas did centuries later about the difference between the truth of things and divided human opinions. Thomas makes it in the same place in his commentary where Simplicius had made it in his own.¹⁰³ For both, commenting on a philosophical text was not just collecting opinions, it was a way of doing philosophy, even the 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

98. Aquinas, *In De Caelo*, 1.22 § 228, 109.

99. For a small sampling of Thomas’ reproduction of Simplicius’ history and acceptance of his judgements on the hermeneutic principles compare Aquinas, *In De Caelo* with Simplicius, *Commentaria in quatuor libros de celo Aristotelis*, Guillermo Morbeto Interprete, as follows: prooemium § 4 = prooemium; 1.6 § 61 = fol. 14va, comm. 11; 1.22 §§ 223–28 = fol. 46ra–fol. 47rb, comments 98–100; 1.23 § 233 = fol. 48rb, comm. 102; 1.29 § 277 = fol. 54va, comm. 125; 1.29 § 283 = fol. 55rb–va, comm. 129; 2.3 § 314 = fol. 61ra, comm. 5; 3.2 §§ 551–55 = fol. 90r comments 4 & 5.

100. Aquinas, *In De Caelo*, 1.22 § 228, 109.

101. *Ibid.*

102. Bossier, “Traductions latines” 306; Aertsen, “Aquinas’s” 21.

103. Simplicius, *Commentaria in de celo* fol. 47rb, comm. 100.

the argument, finding its sources, comparison between positions, and all the other activities of historical inquiry were subordinate to philosophical reasoning. No more than Aquinas, had Simplicius supposed 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*, as also in many other places, 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 had every reason to think that Simplicius agreed with Aristotle on this. Thomas' commentary on this place in Book Three is simply lifted from that of Simplicius, *Morbeto interprete*.¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately, Thomas died before he was able to comment on Book Four, where he said that Aristotle had determined the truth on this matter!

CONCLUSION

Following Simplicius, Thomas set up the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical *viae* as complementary oppositions each of which contributed to the truth. Thomas also followed Simplicius in discerning differences between the hermeneutic methods of the two great schools. He reproduced the history of philosophy of Simplicius as soon as he had his commentaries, agreed with many of his conciliating judgments, and used the same reconciling logical figures. He does not identify himself as a Peripatetic or as a Platonist. However, when he agrees that Aristotle's way of reasoning, *per viam motus*, to the existence of separate substances is *manifestior et certior*, he is sitting in judgment with, not against, Simplicius. For both the sixth- and the thirteenth-century commentators, Plato and Aristotle are assimilated to each other in various ways, and the real possibility of any beginning except that from the sensible is excluded. Thomas' hermeneutic is that of the Platonic tradition in late Antiquity—Thomas certainly thought that the truth was veiled under poetic and symbolic language, judged this mode of speech to be characteristic of theologians, and to be essential for revealing the truth to humans.¹⁰⁵ Consistently with this approach, in the exposition of the *De Caelo*, Aquinas goes so far with Simplicius as to find "something divine (*fabula aliquid divinum continet*)" in the myth that Atlas holds up the heavens.¹⁰⁶

104. Aquinas, *In De Caelo* 3.2 § 551, 281 and Simplicius, *Commentaria in de celo* fol. 90ra, comm. 4.

105. See Aquinas, *ST* 1.1.9 and 10. For Thomas' views and practice on the relation of literal and figurative senses see W.J. Hankey, "Aquinas, Pseudo-Denys, Proclus and Isaiah VI.6," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 64 (1997): 59–93.

106. Aquinas, *In De Caelo* 2.1 § 295, 146.

He would seem, thus, to be on his way to the reconciliation of religious as well as of philosophical traditions. If this should, in fact, be his intent, Thomas would be following Simplicius and his Neoplatonic predecessors in their deepest purposes. This Christian priest, friar, and saint would have placed himself with the "divine" Proclus among the successors of Plato.