



# Philosophy as Way of Life for Christians ? Iamblichan and Porphyrian Reflections on Religion, Virtue, and Philosophy in Thomas Aquinas

Wayne J. Hankey

Volume 59, Number 2, 2003

Le néoplatonisme

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/007419ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/007419ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Faculté de philosophie, Université Laval  
Faculté de théologie et de sciences religieuses, Université Laval

ISSN

0023-9054 (print)

1703-8804 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Hankey, W. J. (2003). Philosophy as Way of Life for Christians ? Iamblichan and Porphyrian Reflections on Religion, Virtue, and Philosophy in Thomas Aquinas. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 59(2), 193–224.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/007419ar>

Article abstract

Pierre Hadot's purpose in developing the notion of ancient philosophy as *exercice spirituel* was to provide an alternative to religion. Within this framework Hadot blames the triumph of Christianity and medieval scholasticism as exemplified in Aquinas for the *perte de la philosophie comme manière de vivre*. The judgment he applies to Aquinas falls equally on ancient Neoplatonism. In fact, however ; for both, there is nothing abstract about the theory philosophy gives to the ascent to God : philosophy is a way of life which transforms us towards deiformity. Like its Neoplatonic predecessor, the mediaeval university contained philosophy as *exercice spirituel* within a Christian spirituality which also directed intellectuals towards a supernatural felicity.

# PHILOSOPHY AS WAY OF LIFE FOR CHRISTIANS ?

## IAMBLICHAN AND PORPHYRIAN REFLECTIONS ON RELIGION, VIRTUE, AND PHILOSOPHY IN THOMAS AQUINAS\*

Wayne J. Hankey

Department of Classics  
Dalhousie University, Halifax

*RÉSUMÉ* : Le but de Pierre Hadot en développant la notion de philosophie ancienne comme « exercice spirituel » était de fournir une solution de rechange à la religion. Dans cette perspective, Hadot rend le triomphe de la chrétienté et de la scolastique médiévale, exemplifié par Thomas d'Aquin, responsable de la « perte de la philosophie comme manière de vivre ». Le jugement qu'il porte sur Thomas d'Aquin s'applique également au néoplatonisme ancien. Or, de fait, pour les deux il n'y a rien d'abstrait dans la théorie de la philosophie comme ascension vers Dieu : la philosophie est une manière de vivre qui nous transforme et nous tourne vers le divin. Comme son prédécesseur néoplatonicien, l'Université médiévale considérait la philosophie comme un « exercice spirituel » dans le cadre d'une spiritualité chrétienne qui préparait aussi les intellectuels à une félicité surnaturelle.

*ABSTRACT* : Pierre Hadot's purpose in developing the notion of ancient philosophy as *exercice spirituel* was to provide an alternative to religion. Within this framework Hadot blames the triumph of Christianity and medieval scholasticism as exemplified in Aquinas for the *perte de la philosophie comme manière de vivre*. The judgment he applies to Aquinas falls equally on ancient Neoplatonism. In fact, however ; for both, there is nothing abstract about the theory philosophy gives to the ascent to God : philosophy is a way of life which transforms us towards *deiformity*. Like its Neoplatonic predecessor, the mediaeval university contained philosophy as *exercice spirituel* within a Christian spirituality which also directed intellectuals towards a *supernatural felicity*.

---

### I. STOIC BEGINNING AND STOIC CONCLUSION

Pierre Hadot's writings and statements bearing on philosophy as a way of life, to which we owe so much for a better understanding of ancient philosophy, have

---

\* This essay originated as a communication for a "Mini-Colloque : Journée néoplatonicienne" at Université Laval, Québec, April 9, 2003. I am most grateful to M. Jean-Marc Narbonne, who organised the colloque and invited my contribution, and to the Faculté de philosophie, my generous hosts.

emerged over a long period. In *La philosophie comme manière de vivre. Entretiens avec Jeannie Carlier et Arnold I. Davidson*, published in 2001, he notes that the first time he wrote about “exercices spirituels” the subject was not “de bon ton,”<sup>1</sup> and, in fact, several years stand between his thinking about ancient philosophy in these terms and his placing his work under this title. In the *Annuaire* of *Section des sciences religieuses* of the *École pratique des hautes études*, his “Rapport sur l’exercice” undertaken in 1971-1972 on Marcus Aurelius describes the work thus :

Cette étude a été menée avec l’intention de mettre en valeur le fait que, dans l’Antiquité, au moins tardive, la philosophie se ramène à des exercices spirituels (méditation, préméditation, examen de conscience) destinés à provoquer une transformation radicale de l’être du philosophe.<sup>2</sup>

As he tells it, his article “Liminaire” for the *Annuaire* “en 1977” entitled “Exercices spirituels” is a significant moment.<sup>3</sup> Here his picture of the history of philosophy, which persists with modifications to the present, is found in outline.

Professor Hadot writes that when the works of the ancients are viewed “dans la perspective de la pratique des exercices spirituels,” philosophy appears “dans son aspect originel, non plus comme une construction théorique, mais comme une méthode de formation à une nouvelle manière de vivre et de voir le monde, comme un effort de transformation de l’homme.” In contrast, our contemporaries, as a result of “l’absorption de la philosophie par le christianisme,” consider philosophy “conformément à une conception héritée du Moyen Âge et des temps modernes, comme une démarche purement théorique et abstraite.” This mediaeval reduction has two stages. First “avec la scolastique du Moyen Âge, *theologia* et *philosophia* se sont clairement distinguées.” Then, theology, autonomous and supreme, reduces philosophy “au rang de ‘servant de la théologie’<sup>4</sup>.”

Within a few years, this *Liminaire* made a profound impression. In an article published in 1981, Hilary Armstrong, himself no friend of mediaeval scholasticism, found it to be an interpretation of the whole of Hellenic philosophy, writing :

P. Hadot, in his profound interpretation of Hellenic philosophy as a whole, *Exercices spirituels* (*Annuaire de l’École pratique des hautes études*, 5<sup>e</sup> Section, T. LXXXIV, p. 25-70)

- 
1. Pierre HADOT, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre. Entretiens avec Jeannie Carlier et Arnold I. Davidson*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2001, p. 150.
  2. *Annuaire : Résumé des conférences et travaux, École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses*, 80-81 (1971-1972 & 1972-1973), Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1973, p. 277.
  3. HADOT, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, p. 68.
  4. Pierre HADOT, “Exercices spirituels,” *Annuaire : Résumé des conférences et travaux, École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses*, 84 (1975-1976), Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1977, p. 68-69. This is reprinted in his *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, Paris, Études augustiniennes, 1981 ; an English translation from the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (1987) is found in *Philosophy as a Way of Life : Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, edited with an introduction by Arnold I. DAVIDSON, translated by Michael Chase, Oxford, Blackwell, 1995, p. 81-125. Some of the chapters in the volume of translations have been revised or rewritten by Professor Hadot ; in consequence, I will use the translations when they differ from the French originals.

has demonstrated that we have in our Western tradition a rich and varied store of the sort of wisdom for which many people now look to the East.<sup>5</sup>

Despite looking at the entire history of Western philosophy through this perspective, it is significant not only that Hadot began explicitly with Stoicism as *exercice spirituel*, but also, that this is where, at the end, he finds its best exemplar and where he is most personally at home.

Early in his scholarly career, Hadot laboured at the Plotinian and Porphyrian neoplatonisms and their fruits in Victorinus and Augustine. He had had mystical experiences as a youth which were not associated with his practice of Catholicism.<sup>6</sup> After reading some of the classic Christian mystical authors while at seminary, he ardently attempted union, but was discouraged by his spiritual directors. Indeed, he was brought to the point of questioning whether “le message chrétien est compatible finalement avec la mystique.”<sup>7</sup> When he read Plotinus in 1945-1946, he discovered “l’existence d’une mystique purement philosophique.”<sup>8</sup> In the context of this attraction to mysticism, Hadot asked to study Plotinus at the university but was set by Père Paul Henry to work on Victorinus instead.<sup>9</sup> Despite doubts concerning Plotinian mysticism, which Hadot dates as starting in 1963 with his writing of *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard*, his interest continued, and, from the beginning of his appointment to the *École pratique* in 1964, he developed research on the mystical treatises of Plotinus. His appointment had been to the chair in Latin Patristics, but, in the 1971-1972 academic year, the title of his post was changed to “Théologies et mystiques de la Grèce hellénistique et de la fin de l’Antiquité” to better reflect his interests. In volume 79 of the *Annuaire*, in the first report of his work in the newly named post, he wrote of “un type de connaissance expérimentale que l’on peut qualifier de ‘mystique’.” For him the character of this *connaissance* with Plotinus seems to be “sans précédent dans la tradition grecque” :

Les éléments nouveaux me paraissent être ceux-ci : 1° idée d’une vision d’un objet sans forme, à la limite vision pure sans objet ; 2° idée d’une transformation du voyant qui à la fois n’est plus lui-même et devient vraiment lui-même ; 3° idée de la transcendance du moi par rapport aux déterminations naturelles : le voyant reste un “moi” mais n’est plus homme.<sup>10</sup>

This knowing meets the requirements of philosophy *comme manière de vivre* because in it the knower is transformed to become more truly himself. However, in recent interviews, Hadot now reports : first that personally, mystical experience, whether

5. A.H. ARMSTRONG, “Negative Theology, Myth and Incarnation,” in *Néoplatonisme, mélanges offerts à Jean Trouillard*, Fontenay-aux-Roses, École normale supérieure (coll. “Cahiers de Fontenay,” 19-22), 1981, p. 60, n. 14, reprinted in A.H. ARMSTRONG, *Hellenic and Christian Studies*, London, Variorum, 1990, § VII.

6. HADOT, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, p. 25-32 ; see p. 128-129.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 126 ; see p. 32.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 126.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 44 ; see p. 59.

10. *Annuaire : Résumé des conférences et travaux, École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses*, 79 (1972), p. 273.

Christian or Plotinian, no longer has a vital interest for him ; second, that Neoplatonism no longer seems a tenable position ; and, third, that “le stoïcisme et aussi l’*épïcùrisme* sont plus accessibles que Plotin à nos contemporains.”<sup>11</sup>

What is involved in his turn both from Plotinian mysticism in particular, and also from Neoplatonism generally, back to the Stoicism with which his study of philosophy as spiritual exercise began comes out in an interview with Michael Chase, where he confesses that he has become “considerably detached from Plotinus” :

[...] in 1946, I naively believed that I, too, could relive the Plotinian mystical experience. But I later realized that this was an illusion. The conclusion of my book *Plotinus* already hinted that the idea of the “purely spiritual” is untenable. It is true that there is something ineffable in human experience, but this ineffable is *within* our very perception of the world, in the mystery of our existence and that of the cosmos.<sup>12</sup>

Hadot’s preference for Stoicism and Epicureanism, as against Neoplatonism, is thus not only based in a judgment about what is most accessible to us, but also in a judgment about the nature of reality, in effect a denial of transcendence.<sup>13</sup> In fact, as I hope to show, his preference for these schools is built into his *conception* of philosophy as way of life and spiritual exercise, and into the *purpose* of this representation of philosophy. His criticisms of Christianity as destructive of philosophy *comme manière de vivre* have, in fact, the same roots.

## II. THE DEADLY TRIUMPH OF CHRISTIANITY

Thirty years have passed since Professor Hadot used the term “exercice spirituel” to describe features of the philosophy of Marcus Aurelius. There have been important developments and modifications in his representation of Hellenic philosophy, and of its history within and beyond Antiquity, *comme manière de vivre*. They include finding continuations of it in the Middle Ages and in modernity, as well as among contemporaries like Wittgenstein and Foucault. Nonetheless, Hadot judges — and few would disagree with him — that the West has generally lost such a practice of philosophy. Hadot, however, does more than describe the loss, he identifies the cause : he blames “le triomphe du christianisme” for “le recul et l’oubli de cette conception de la philosophie,”<sup>14</sup> and for the reduction of philosophy to the abstractly theoretical production and manipulation of concepts divorced from life. Within Christianity and its secular progeny, philosophy serves other forms of knowing what is, other determinations of what is to be done, and other powers shaping the self and enabling life. We must agree with him that philosophy as professionally practiced in the depart-

---

11. HADOT, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, p. 137.

12. Pierre HADOT, “Postscript,” in *Philosophy as a Way of Life : Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, p. 280-281.

13. See Giovanni CATAPANO, “È possibile recuperare oggi la coscienza cosmica del saggio antico ? La proposta di Pierre Hadot,” in *Il problema della relazione uomo-mondo*, a cura di G.L. BRENA, Padova, Gregoriana Libreria Editrice, 2000, p. 83-90.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 181 ; and see Pierre HADOT, *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie antique ?*, Paris, Gallimard (coll. “Folio essais”), 1995, p. 355-407.

ments of contemporary universities mostly has this character, and, indeed, intends to have it. More importantly, we must render him homage and thanks for his investigation of the spirituality of the philosophical schools of Antiquity, illumining something essential to their character which we had mostly forgotten, for retrieving something of the greatest value in philosophy which some now attempt again, and for the extraordinary sensitivity and creativity in his description of diverse ways and means of the construction and care for the self in those schools. Nonetheless, questions may be asked about his genealogy.

For Hadot the abstractly theoretical university philosophy is the result of developments within the university — significantly an institution created by mediaeval Christianity, which he characterises as follows :

[...] the university is [...] made up of professors who train professors, or professionals training professionals. Education was thus no longer directed toward people who were to be educated with a view to becoming fully developed human beings, but to specialists, in order that they might train other specialists. This is the danger of “Scholasticism,” that philosophical tendency which began to be sketched at the end of Antiquity, developed in the Middle Ages, and whose presence is still recognizable in philosophy today.<sup>15</sup>

Here, and elsewhere, Hadot acknowledges the origins of scholasticism in Antiquity and shows us that the mediaeval developments are continuations. The oral dialogue, which is formative of philosophy as *exercice spirituel* in Antiquity, develops, when written texts have become essential to the life of the school, into oral exercises of explication. As the practice of Plotinus, among others, makes clear, the disciplines of the schools involve oral commentary. Texts become points of departure for oral communal interchange. Proceeding from a definition of mediaeval scholasticism offered by M.-D. Chenu, Hadot writes about its early origins :

[...] on peut dire que le discours philosophique, à partir du 1<sup>er</sup> siècle av. J.-C. commence à devenir une scolastique et la scolastique du Moyen Âge en sera l’héritière [...] à un certain point de vue cette époque voit la naissance de l’ère des professeurs.<sup>16</sup>

In the mediaeval schools, as in the ancient, philosophers comment on the texts of Aristotle “suivant les modèles de l’Antiquité tardive.”<sup>17</sup> “Les exercices scolaires de la *lectio* et de la *disputatio* ne font que prolonger les méthodes d’enseignement et d’exercice en honneur dans les écoles de l’Antiquité.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, these practices are not everything the schools of Antiquity have in common with those of the Middle Ages. For Neoplatonists what is common includes not only their purpose, namely, the ascent to the divine Good of its members, but also, as serving this end : the priority of theology, the placing of philosophy within theology and religious life, the practice of religion as part of the life of the school, and even subordination to the leadership of a “divine” priest-professor. Nonetheless, despite his not only being aware of these

15. Pierre HADOT, “Philosophy as a Way of Life,” in *Philosophy as a Way of Life : Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, p. 270 ; see also *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie antique ?*, p. 389.

16. HADOT, *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie antique ?*, p. 235.

17. HADOT, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, p. 182.

18. HADOT, *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie antique ?*, p. 387.

common features, but often being the one who has taught us about them, Hadot identifies the fatal element in the transformation philosophy underwent in the scholastic theology of the mediaeval university with its Christianity.

Making Christianity the element which explains our loss is ironic and perhaps even paradoxical because ancient philosophy formed essential features of Christianity as a way of life. Hadot writes : “[...] c’est la théologie chrétienne qui est devenue ascétique et mystique, reprenant, en les christianisant, les exercices spirituels et certains thèmes mystiques de la philosophie.”<sup>19</sup> Late Antiquity is characterised at every level — political, social, psychological as well, as religious, philosophical and theological — by “une fusion du christianisme et du paganisme” ; “les deux adversaires s’étaient contaminés mutuellement, dans l’ardeur de la lutte.”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, so thoroughly was the self-understanding of the ancient schools, as well as their structures, aims, and techniques taken into Christianity, that it represents itself as the true philosophy. Episcopal *curiae* resemble philosophical schools ; ancient and mediaeval monasteries identify their practice of Christianity *contra mundum* as *philosophia* and preserve essential features of philosophy as a way of life which have been lost to us. In contrast to present approaches to the history of philosophy (*i.e.* “l’analyse de la genèse et des structures des œuvres littéraires qui ont été écrites par les philosophes, notamment dans l’étude de l’enchaînement rationnel et la cohérence interne de ces exposés systématiques”<sup>21</sup>), ancient philosophy was “plus une parole vivante qu’un écrit, et plus encore une vie qu’une parole.”<sup>22</sup> Hadot writes of the end of the “*Phèdre*, dans laquelle Platon laisse entendre que seul le dialogue vivant est durable et immortel parce qu’il s’écrit dans des âmes vivantes et non dans des pages mortes.” In consequence of preserving these features, the self-examination and other aspects of the *exercices spirituels*, as well as the philosophers’ contempt of the world, Hadot judges : “Le mouvement philosophique, dans l’Antiquité, présente beaucoup d’analogies avec le monachisme (cela n’a rien d’étonnant, car le monachisme chrétien est, en partie, l’héritier de la philosophie antique et se présente d’ailleurs lui-même comme une *philosophia*).”<sup>23</sup>

In some of these representations of Christian monasticism Hadot refers not only to the texts of the Fathers and mediaevals but to the well-established work of Dom Jean Leclercq whom he quotes and glosses as follows :

- 
19. HADOT, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, p. 182 ; there is an extensive consideration of this matter in “Exercices spirituels antiques et ‘philosophie chrétienne’,” in *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, p. 59-74 ; and is translated in *Philosophy as a Way of Life : Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, p. 126-144.
  20. Pierre HADOT, “La Fin du paganisme,” reprinted in Pierre HADOT, *Études de philosophie ancienne*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres (coll. “L’Âne d’or”), 1998, p. 342.
  21. Pierre HADOT, “Préface,” in R. GOULET, dir., *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, Paris, Éditions du Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1989 ; reprinted in HADOT, *Études de philosophie ancienne*, p. 259-273 ; at p. 12 (my page references are to the original).
  22. *Ibid.*
  23. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

“Dans le Moyen Âge monastique, aussi bien que dans l’Antiquité, *philosophia* désigne non pas une théorie ou une manière de connaître mais une sagesse vécue, une manière de vivre selon la raison”, c’est-à-dire selon le Logos.<sup>24</sup>

Of course this idea of Christian philosophy is set both by Leclercq and by Hadot over against the mediaeval scholastic idea. Nonetheless, in recent writings Hadot notes the studies of mediaevalists like Rudi Imbach and Alain de Libera who show how the ancient idea of philosophy was retrieved by the lay intellectuals of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Although Dante is the greatest of them, some of these intellectuals taught in the universities and, even though they were Christians believers, they developed a real independence for philosophy which motivated their manner of life.<sup>25</sup>

Despite these realities, Professor Hadot insists : “au sein du christianisme, tout spécialement au Moyen Âge, un divorce entre le mode de vie et le discours philosophique” became real.<sup>26</sup> Because “le mode de vie était chrétien : la philosophie ne pouvait pas proposer un autre mode de vie que celui qui était lié à la théologie chrétienne.”<sup>27</sup> Apparently, for Hadot, and for his account, unless philosophy is total, autonomous, and complete, offering *un autre mode de vie* it must become abstractly theoretical ; reduced to a handmaiden, it is instrumental only, providing conceptual material for others. It cannot among the Christians remain alive within religion and theology, as it did for the later Neoplatonists. Among Christians the philosophical discourse of what remained of the ancient philosophical schools :

[...] séparés des modes de vie qui les inspiraient, ils ont été ramenés au rang d’un simple matériel conceptuel utilisable dans les controverses théologiques. La “philosophie”, mise au service de la théologie, n’était plus désormais qu’un discours théorique, et lorsque la philosophie moderne conquerra son autonomie, [...] elle aura toujours tendance à se limiter à ce point de vue.<sup>28</sup>

Reaching further back, Hadot judges that in fact the mediaeval theologians developed tendencies present in the Fathers. Juliusz Domański, *La philosophie, théorie ou manière de vivre*<sup>29</sup> provides Hadot with crucial and indicative examples from the mediaevals, and Aquinas is largely used as evidence.

I have problems with the conception of philosophy on which Hadot’s project depends and with the representation of the history it entails — especially its consequences for the treatment of Platonism generally and post-Iamblichan Neoplatonism particularly, of mediaeval scholasticism generally and Aquinas particularly, and of university life in early modern Europe. However, I make no pretence to give here —

24. Jean LECLERCQ, “Pour l’histoire de l’expression ‘philosophie chrétienne,’” quoted in HADOT, *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie antique ?*, p. 360.

25. My list of the relevant works would include François-Xavier PUTALLAZ, Ruedi IMBACH, *Profession philosophie : Siger de Brabant*, Paris, Cerf (coll. “Initiations au Moyen Âge”), 1997 ; Ruedi IMBACH, *Dante, la philosophie et les laïcs*, Paris, Cerf ; Fribourg, Éditions universitaires (coll. “Vestigia,” 21), 1996 ; Alain de LIBERA, *Penser au Moyen Âge*, Paris, Seuil, 1991.

26. HADOT, *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie antique ?*, p. 380.

27. HADOT, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, p. 182.

28. HADOT, *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie antique ?*, p. 380.

29. Juliusz DOMAŃSKI, *La philosophie, théorie ou manière de vivre. Les controverses de l’Antiquité à la Renaissance*, Paris, Cerf ; Fribourg, Éditions universitaires (coll. “Vestigia,” 18), 1996.



or indeed to be able to give elsewhere — either an alternative interpretation of Hellenic philosophy as a whole or another genealogy of the present state of philosophy to that worked out with so much subtlety and to our great profit by Professor Hadot over thirty years. I do not know why philosophy has evolved from being a way of life in the ancient sense, and I do not judge whether this change is for better or worse. I do not pretend to rival Hadot ; my most substantial aim is to illumine some features of the thought of Thomas Aquinas by connecting him with Plotinus and Porphyry on the virtues and with Iamblichus and his successors on the place of philosophy in the itinerarium of the soul. In attempting this, I shall discuss the following :

- 1) A misrepresentation by Professor Hadot of the place and character of philosophy for Aquinas and of the virtues it promotes, this misrepresentation seems to have resulted from looking at Thomas through modern Catholic spirituality and through Neothomist accounts of his philosophy.
- 2) How these elements of the thought of Aquinas are anticipated in ancient Neoplatonism.
- 3) How the exclusion of philosophy within mediaeval theology from being a spiritual exercise or way of life (and in principle also philosophy within later Neoplatonist theology and spiritual ascent) are predetermined by Hadot's definition of philosophy and by his purpose in making it a way of life.

While I must discuss each of these matters, this list does not give the order of what follows.

### **III. PIERRE HADOT : “JE N’AIME PAS JAMBLIQUE ET PROCLUS”<sup>30</sup>**

I hope that it will have become apparent already, first, that what is problematic for Hadot in the mediaeval university had begun to emerge more than a millennium earlier in the philosophical schools of Antiquity, especially in the Platonic schools, and, second, that there is reason to suppose that his problems may be with what Neoplatonism and Christianity have in common. I think it can be shown that, while these problematic features are especially characteristic of post-Plotinian Neoplatonism, at least their seeds are also found in Plotinus and explain Hadot's turn away from him.

In his most recent utterances Professor Hadot tells us that he laboured greatly to find an expression which would convey the sense of what he had discerned about the character of ancient philosophy, rejecting several alternatives to “exercices spirituels.”<sup>31</sup> He deemed it crucial that people on all sides ordinarily used the term without thinking of religion. In the end ancient philosophy “est exercice spirituel, parce

---

30. HADOT, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, p. 71.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 150-152.

qu'elle est un mode de vie, une forme de vie, un choix de vie."<sup>32</sup> In this formulation practice has priority :

[I]n Antiquity [...] a philosopher was above all someone who lived in a philosophical way [...] someone whose life was guided by his or her reason, and who was a practitioner of the moral virtues.<sup>33</sup>

What is practiced may be theory, as is the case with the Aristotelians, but the theory may not be abstract, it must be practiced. The Aristotelian *manière de vivre* involves choosing "la vie de savant, une vie consacrée aux études." This *théorétique* life is one "dans lequel on 'contemple' les choses" and, by this contemplation, the Aristotelian comes to "une participation à la pensée divine." Further, the approach to science is consciously disinterested : "c'est une étude qui n'est pas faite dans un intérêt particulier, pour des objectifs matériels"<sup>34</sup> and thus the philosopher has been morally transformed.

In other schools theory may not be itself the life, but "en tout cas [...] il y a une causalité réciproque entre réflexion théorétique et choix de vie."<sup>35</sup> It is important, however, that for Hadot, in the reciprocal relationship, the act of will comes first, theory is subsequent and subordinate : "[L]a réflexion théorétique suppose déjà un certain choix de vie, mais ce choix de vie ne peut progresser et se préciser que à grâce à la réflexion théorétique."<sup>36</sup> "Originally, then, philosophy is above all the choice of a way of life, to which philosophical discourse then gives justifications and theoretical foundations."<sup>37</sup> These justifications necessitate theory as an essential of the philosophical life : "Il faut que le mode de vie philosophique se justifie dans un discours philosophique rationnel et motivé."<sup>38</sup> Hadot's affirmation of practice goes along with a rejection for him, namely, of religion. The crucial point for Hadot is not the subordination of theory, in fact he himself subordinates theory to the choice of a way of life. Instead, his purposes exclude the subordination of theory to religion. All is determined at the beginning. His *Liminaire* "Exercices spirituels" seeks to offer "à ceux qui ne peuvent ou ne veulent vivre selon un mode de vie religieux, la possibilité de choisir un mode de vie purement philosophique."<sup>39</sup> Along with that aim there must come problems with Neoplatonism as well as with Christianity.

When asked about philosophy and religion, Hadot maintains : "on doit prendre bien soin de distinguer rigoureusement religion et philosophie" where religion refers to "des images, des personnes, des offrandes, des fêtes, des lieux, consacrés à Dieu ou aux dieux."<sup>40</sup> He goes on from this to assert again that the mysticism of Plotinus was

32. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

33. HADOT, "Postscript," p. 281.

34. HADOT, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, p. 161.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

36. *Ibid.*

37. HADOT, "Postscript," p. 281.

38. HADOT, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique ?*, p. 422.

39. HADOT, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, p. 68.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

purely philosophical and, then, to state his dislike for Iamblichus and Proclus (“Je n’aime pas Jamblique et Proclus.”) In mixing religion and philosophy, their sin is double ; it is against religion and philosophy both. On the one hand, “leur critique purificatrice est presque une critique destructrice” killing all the charm and sacred horror of the gods. On the other, “ils ont fait entrer dans la philosophie des pratiques parfois superstitieuses et puériles.” What they did is, for him, “difficilement pardonnable” and remains “assez énigmatique.”<sup>41</sup>

These judgments are problematic for many reasons. The Neoplatonic schools are paradigms of communities where “l’enseignement est ordonné à des exercices spirituels, mais associé aussi bien à une pratique religieuse ou encore à une instruction civique, de telle sorte que la vie de l’élève s’y trouve entièrement impliquée.”<sup>42</sup> Their dominance *vis-à-vis* other schools in late Antiquity derived from their power to synthesize the philosophical, spiritual, and religious wealth and traditions of Hellenism. This was also the basis of their future influence. We must solve the alleged “enigma” if we are to understand the philosophical schools of Antiquity. In consequence, several questions arise at this point : are Hadot’s characterizations of the religion of the later Neoplatonists and its power for those who practiced it balanced ? Much recent scholarship makes this questionable. How much ancient philosophy remains if those forms which mix religion and philosophy be excluded ? Is Hadot illuminating ancient philosophy for us, or just as much narrowly specifying what counts as philosophy ?

The Stoicism and Epicureanism with which he ends tend toward a more or less total demythologizing of religion — one could, indeed, say that “leur critique purificatrice est presque une critique destructive.” In contrast, Aristotelianism, and especially Platonism, are at least compatible with religious practice, and normally go with it. This was even true of Plotinus, and, so far as he was austere intellectual, he was the heretic in the Platonic school.<sup>43</sup> Theurgy was practiced among Platonists before

---

41. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

42. Introduction to PLOTIN, *Traité 1-6*, trad. L. Brisson et J.-F. Pradeau, Paris, Flammarion, 2002, p. 12.

43. The bibliography required for a full discussion of these questions is enormous, but some recent contributions might include the Introduction to PLOTIN, *Traité 1-6*, p. 12-15 on the school of Plotinus ; on Aristotle’s religion, see Richard BODÉÛS, *The Theology of the Living Immortals*, trans. Jan Garrett, Albany, SUNY Press, 2000 ; on the religion of Platonists see M.L. MCPHERRAN, *The Religion of Socrates*, University Park, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania University Press, 1996, p. 5-12 ; on the continuities from Plato to Iamblichus, see Gregory SHAW, “After Aporia : Theurgy in Later Platonism,” *The Journal of Neoplatonic Studies*, 5, 1 (1996), p. 3-41 ; on Plotinus as the non-conformist among Platonists, see H.J. BLUMENTHAL, *Aristotle and Neoplatonism in late Antiquity. Interpretation of the De Anima*, London, Duckworth, 1996, p. 18 ; H.D. SAFFREY, *Le Néoplatonisme après Plotin*, Paris, Vrin (coll. “Histoire des doctrines de l’Antiquité classique,” 24), 2000, p. VIII ; G. SHAW, *Theurgy and the Soul : the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, University Park, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania University Press, 1996, p. 4-17 ; and R.M. VAN DEN BERG, “Towards the Paternal Harbour : Proclean Theurgy and the Contemplation of the Forms,” in A.P. SEGONDS, C. STEEL, ed., *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*, Leuven, Leuven University Press ; Paris, Les Belles Lettres (coll. “Ancient and Medieval Philosophy,” Series I, XXVI), 2000, p. 425-426 ; for re-evaluations of the character of religion among the later Neoplatonists, see A.P. SEGONDS, “Liminaire,” in *Proclus et la théologie platonicienne*, p. XIX-XXI ; G. Shaw, “Eros and Arithmos : Pythagorean Theurgy in Iamblichus and Plotinus,” *Ancient Philosophy* (Spring 1999), p. 121-143 ; ARMSTRONG, “Negative Theology, Myth and Incarnation” ; and H.J. BLUMENTHAL, E.G. CLARK, “Introduction : Iamblichus in 1990,” in *The Divine Iamblichus. Philosopher and Man of Gods*, London, Duckworth, 1993, p. 1-4. It is significant

Iamblichus. Porphyry had practiced it before Plotinus made him more reserved and critical, and still made a place for it — after all Iamblichus and Porphyry are only disputing about the role of theurgy, whether philosophy is within religion practice or whether theurgy is a technique used as preliminary by philosophy as *religio mentis*. The necessity for religion, of demonic mediators, and even the practice of magic is established already with the Middle Platonists as Apuleius of Madauros gives evidence.<sup>44</sup> Growing acceptance of theurgy is a mark of the mainstream within the Platonic tradition. If we follow the ancients, to be a way of life, there is no necessity to set up philosophy as a total and complete alternative to religion.<sup>45</sup> In fact, to do so would have been unusual. The cause of Hadot's enigma may lie in his experience. According to his account, Hadot's judgments and purposes seem to be moved by his own experience of religion, as usurping the effective practicality of philosophy, and of Neothomist theology, as reducing philosophy to abstract theory producing concepts serving theology. This is not, as a matter of fact, what happens in Aquinas, and, in how philosophy serves what is beyond it, Aquinas shares much with his Neoplatonic predecessors.

Professor Hadot tells us a good deal about his early religious life and his education in the recent *entretiens* published in both French and English. He seems to regard these as relevant to his work and, indeed, they appear to be determinative of some crucial judgments and purposes. What surprises is the extent to which this scholar, so sensitive to context in his study of Antiquity, allows modern and contemporary forms of Christian religion, theology, and philosophy to color his understanding of their mediaeval antecedents. For the faults in priestly formation he endured, he reproaches the Sulpicians, who directed most of the seminaries in France and who, in his view, remained stuck in their 17<sup>th</sup> century origins and in the spirituality of their founder, Jean-Jacques Olier, whom Hadot regards as a “personnage assez bizarre.”<sup>46</sup> Olier was a follower of Pierre de Bérulle, the self-conscious author of a Christocentric spiritual revolution. His movement was part of the Augustinian revival in early modernity, which produced in French Catholicism a doctrine of grace mirroring the Calvinism against which it fought.<sup>47</sup> Not surprisingly, the spirituality in which the Sulpicians raised Hadot involved an extreme opposition between nature and grace. There was “confiance aveugle dans la toute-puissance de la grâce.” All power to act is reduced to what Hadot calls a “surnaturalisme” which he defines thus : “c'est l'idée selon la-

---

that a considerable force for this re-evaluation was Jean Trouillard whose enthusiasm for Neoplatonism Hadot rejects (*La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, p. 137).

44. See Louis-André DORION, “Socrate, le *daimonion* et la divination,” in J. LAURENT, ed., *Les dieux de Platon. Actes du colloque international de Caen (24-26 janvier 2002)*, Caen, Presses Universitaires de Caen, forthcoming.

45. See F. BRUNNER, “L'aspect rationnel et l'aspect religieux de la philosophie de Plotin,” *Revue de théologie et de philosophie*, 122 (1990), p. 417-430.

46. HADOT, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, p. 52.

47. See W.J. HANKEY, “Augustinian Immediacy and Dionysian Mediation in John Colet, Edmund Spenser, Richard Hooker and the Cardinal de Bérulle,” in Kurt FLASCH, Dominique de COURCELLES, ed., *Augustinus in der Neuzeit. Colloque de la Herzog August Bibliothek de Wolfenbüttel, 14-17 octobre 1996*, Turnhout, Brepols, 1998, p. 154.

quelle c'est surtout par les moyens surnaturels que l'on peut modifier sa manière de se comporter."<sup>48</sup> Hadot experienced this supernaturalism as destructive both in religion and also in philosophy and morality. On the one hand, he was discouraged from attaining "l'expérience mystique" because these phenomena were altogether exceptional, given by God's grace "selon son bon plaisir." In the place of high mystical aims he was offered "une piété très sentimentale."<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, philosophy, and the moral virtues by which it shapes its way of life disappear. Hadot locates the foundation of this *surnaturalisme* "dans la théologie thomiste, et peut-être même d'une manière générale dans toute théologie chrétienne, sur l'idée que, depuis le Révélation et la Rédemption, il n'y a plus de morale naturelle."<sup>50</sup> Remarkably, according to Hadot, nothing essential has changed in the seven hundred year history of this Thomism. Hadot writes :

Et, précisément, l'on peut constater que les tenants de la philosophie néo-scholastique ou thomiste ont continué, comme au Moyen Âge, à considérer la philosophie comme une démarche purement théorique [...]. Avec la clarté d'esprit qui le caractérisait, il [É. Gilson] voyait l'essentiel du problème lorsqu'il écrivait : "La position philosophique la plus favorable n'est pas celle du philosophe mais celle du chrétien", la grande supériorité du christianisme consistant en ce qu'il n'était pas "une simple connaissance abstraite de la vérité, mais une méthode efficace de salut."<sup>51</sup>

What makes Hadot fail to ask whether what Thomas taught in the 13<sup>th</sup> century is the same as the various Thomisms of 17<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries ? Elsewhere he not only notes that the Thomism of Étienne Gilson was "une version fortement teintée de la philosophie du moment," but also quotes Jacques Maritain on how scholastic pedagogy is the worst enemy of the metaphysics of Thomism.<sup>52</sup> Hadot does not conflate Plato and Iamblichus, but the temporal separation is no greater. In truth, there is more continuity between Iamblichus and Aquinas on the place of philosophy *vis-à-vis* religion and theology than there is between Aquinas and the Neothomism on which Hadot was raised in respect to the same matters,<sup>53</sup> and there is a greater continuity between Porphyry and Aquinas on how the cardinal virtues function within a religious life, than there is between Aquinas and the piety of Sulpician seminaries in respect to moral virtue. Given Professor Hadot's distaste for Neoplatonism, showing this may do neither Christianity nor Neoplatonism much good in his judgment, but we may gain a better perspective on the history.

---

48. HADOT, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, p. 54.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

51. HADOT, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique ?*, p. 388, quoting GILSON's *L'Esprit de la philosophie médiévale*.

52. HADOT, *La philosophie comme manière de vivre*, p. 43 ; and HADOT, "Postscript," p. 279.

53. For part of the explanation of this difference see W.J. HANKEY, "From Metaphysics to History, from Exodus to Neoplatonism, from Scholasticism to Pluralism : the fate of Gilsonian Thomism in English-speaking North America," *Dionysius*, 16 (1998), p. 157-188.

#### IV. WHAT NATURE WILLS IT MUST BE ABLE TO DO : HUMAN VIRTUE IN AQUINAS<sup>54</sup>

One of the happier surprises awaiting a Neoplatonist working his way through the logic chopping questions comprising so much of the treatise on the Incarnation in the *Summa Theologiae* is to find Plotinus cited with approval. When Thomas wants to show that Christ has virtues, he uses a schema he attributes to Plotinus according to the report of Macrobius. The philosopher he finds referred to in the *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* as “Plotinus, inter philosophiae professores cum Platone princeps”<sup>55</sup> helps demonstrate that “a heroic or divine *habitus* does not differ from virtue as it is commonly spoken of except that it is possessed in a more perfect mode.”<sup>56</sup> What Aquinas takes as being from Plotinus enables a hierarchical community to be established between virtue in Christ and virtue in other humans so that grace can flow from him to them. Thomas’ understanding of the operation of divine grace as deriving to humans through Christ’s humanity, “an instrument animated by a rational soul which is so acted upon as to act”,<sup>57</sup> continues the building up of the rational human who is “principle of its own works as having free will and power over its own works,”<sup>58</sup> which characterises Thomas’ *Summa* from the start. Because the humanity of Christ is united to the divinity “through the medium of intelligence”,<sup>59</sup> “our union with God [by grace] is through activity according as we know and love him.”<sup>60</sup> In contrast to Bérulle’s endless talk of *abnégation*, *anéantissement*, and *dénuement* as necessary for true union,<sup>61</sup> which within the Mediaeval controversies would have seemed to verge on heresy, Thomas tirelessly repeats : “Grace does not destroy nature but perfects it.”<sup>62</sup> However, while seeing that grace in Thomas strengthens the human rational power and freedom, may hint that what Hadot encountered as Thomism is some distance from Aquinas, to establish this we must attend to the first occurrence of the doctrine he ascribes to Plotinus. This is found in the *Prima Secundae* in

54. AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, Ottawa, 1953, 1-2.5.5 ad 1 : *natura non deficit homini in necessariis*.

55. ST 1-2.61.5 *sed contra*.

56. ST 3.7.2 ad 2 : *habitus ille heroicus vel divinus non differt a virtute communiter dictus nisi secundum perfectiorem modum*.

57. ST 3.7.1 ad 3.

58. ST 1-2, prologus : *ipse est suorum operum principium, quasi liberum arbitrium habens et suorum operum potestatem*.

59. ST 3.6.2 *corpus*.

60. ST 3.6.6 ad 1.

61. Besides Bellemare and Yelle as cited below, on Bérulle see especially P. COCHOIS, “Bérulle, hiérarque dionysien,” *Revue d’ascétique et de mystique*, 147 (1961), p. 314-353 and 151 (1962), p. 354-375 ; ID., “Bérulle, initiateur mystique : les vœux de servitude,” *Annuaire : Résumé des conférences et travaux, École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences historiques et philologiques* (1959-1960), p. 111-115 ; and F.G. PRECKLER, “État” chez le cardinal de Bérulle. *Théologie et spiritualité des “états” bérulliens*, Rome, Gregorian University (coll. “Analecta Gregoriana,” 197), 1974, p. 87ff. ; contrast, AQUINAS, ST 3.4.2 and 3.2.6, reading them with the explanations of their context in Richard CROSS, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation : Thomas Aquinas to Duns Scotus*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 31-32, 240-245, and 249.

62. For example at ST 1.1.8 ad 2.

the treatment of the moral or cardinal virtues. There an entire article is devoted to the doctrine Thomas attributes to Plotinus and adopts as his own.

The article asks “Whether the cardinal virtues are fittingly divided into political, purgative, purified and exemplar virtues ?” The schema is taken from Macrobius *In Somnium Scipionis*, which is among the earliest sources for Thomas’ knowledge of Neoplatonism. The text Macrobius, and, on his authority, Aquinas, ascribe to Plotinus is, in fact, from Porphyry,<sup>63</sup> although it is little more than a schematized summary of the doctrine found in Plotinus “On Virtues.”<sup>64</sup> Aquinas wholeheartedly adopts it as his own. It fits into, because it belongs to, a logic essential to Thomas’ thought which also derives from Porphyry’s *Sententiae ad intelligibilia ducentes*. The *sententia* “All things are in all things but everything is accommodated to the *ousia* of each knower : in the intellect according to *noerôs*, in the soul rationally (*logismôs*) [...]” has become the general principle in Aquinas : “a thing is received according to the mode of the receiver” (*receptum est in recipiente per modum recipientis*).<sup>65</sup> Aquinas did not find the principle in Porphyry, but it was in many of his Neoplatonic sources, including the pseudo-Dionysius, Boethius, and the *Liber de Causis*.<sup>66</sup> In his commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, written at about the same time as the *Prima Secundae*, he opines that Plato knew the principle (which Thomas formulates with a slight difference) : “Plato saw that each thing is received in something else according to the capacity of the recipient” (*unumquodque recipitur in aliquo secundum mensuram recipientis*).<sup>67</sup> Thomas continues to use the Porphyrian schema attributed to Plotinus for ordering the virtues to the various levels of subjectivity in his *Quaestio Disputata de Virtutibus Cardinalibus*, which was completed at the end of this period (1271-1272).<sup>68</sup> Macrobius is not, however, his only Neoplatonic source for this hierarchical ordering of the virtues. When, in the *Prima Secundae*, Thomas asks “Whether there is *habitus* in the angels ?”, in order to give an affirmative answer, he turns to the *Commentary on the Categories of Aristotle* by Simplicius. There he finds that “Wisdom which is a habit in the soul, is substance in intellect. For all divine realities are suffi-

- 
63. For what Thomas cites as being in fact from PORPHYRY’S *Sententiae ad intelligibilia ducentes*, see MACROBIUS, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. W.H. Stahl, New York, Columbia University Press (coll. “Records of Civilization,” “Sources and Studies,” 48), 1952, p. 121, n. 3 ; and S. GERSH, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism : The Latin Tradition*, vol. II, Notre Dame, Indiana, Notre Dame University Press (coll. “Notre Dame Studies in medieval studies,” 23), 1986, p. 508-509, n. 91. For a discussion see J.P. HOCHSCHILD, “Porphyry, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas : A Neoplatonic Hierarchy of Virtues and Two Christian Appropriations,” in John INGLIS, ed., *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism and Christianity*, Richmond, England, Curzon Press, 2002, p. 245-259.
64. *Ennead* 1.2 ; I use the text in PLOTINUS, *Enneads*, trans. A.H. Armstrong, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press ; London, W. Heinemann (coll. “Loeb Classical Library”), 1966-1988.
65. PORPHYRY, *Sententiae ad Intelligibilia Ducentes*, ed. E. Lamberz, Leipzig, Teubner, 1975, c. 10 ; AQUINAS, *ST* 1.84.1 *corpus*.
66. See W.J. HANKEY, “Aquinas and the Platonists,” in S. GERSH, M.J.F.M HOENEN, ed., with the assistance of P.T. VAN WINGERDEN, *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages : A Doxographic Approach*, Berlin, New York, Walter de Gruyter, 2002, p. 308-309 and 321-322.
67. AQUINAS, *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Expositio*, ed. M.R. Cathala and R.M. Spiazzi, Turin, Rome, Marietti, 1964, cap. 1, lect. 10, § 167, p. 48.
68. AQUINAS, *Quaestio Disputata de Virtutibus Cardinalibus*, in *Quaestiones Disputatae*, vol. II, Turin, Rome, Marietti, 1965, 1.2. *ad* 7.

cient to themselves and exist in themselves.” And, “the habits of intellectual substances are not like those habits here (*non sunt similes his qui sunt hic habitibus*), but they more like simple and immaterial forms which the substance contains in itself.”<sup>69</sup> In this article, Simplicius is found to accord with Maximus and with the Pseudo-Dionysius. Further, in the same place, the Porphyrian principle by which the mode of a rational substance and the mode of its acts are brought into agreement is derived from the *Liber de Causis* : “so far as it is in act, it is able to understand some things through its own essence, at least itself, and other things according to the mode of its own substance.”

The doctrine which both Bonaventure and Aquinas derive from Porphyry in opposition to Aristotle (for whom to attribute virtues to God is absurd<sup>70</sup>) enables the moral virtues of prudence, temperance, courage, and justice to be attributed in different modes to God, angels, and humans, to different states and stages of human life, and to different powers of action. The net result is that Aquinas can move on in *Quaestio* 62 to the theological or infused virtues without reducing what is below to what is above. As Joshua Hochschild puts it :

[...] it allows us to understand how human “lives” that can be differentiated can still be necessarily related : the political and the contemplative man are engaged in different activities, but both are engaged in human activities, and so the same virtues are actualized in them according to different modes.<sup>71</sup>

There are, of course, higher virtues than the moral, those of faith, hope, and charity. These must be infused in us by God’s grace so that we can attain a supernatural end proposed to us by divine revelation as beyond the reach of human reason and human effort. However, grace in Aquinas always presupposes nature. What belongs to nature, as distinguished from grace, has a completeness for knowledge, will, and work.

For Aquinas, there is an account of being as being and of all its kinds, including God, which the philosophical sciences give and in relation to which theology as sacred (or revealed doctrine) must justify itself.<sup>72</sup> The very first article of the first question of the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae* asks : “Whether it is necessary besides the philosophical disciplines to have another teaching ?” The first objection in the whole system proposes that : “[...] whatever is not above reason is fully treated in philosophical science. Therefore, besides philosophical science, there is no need of

69. *ST* 1-2.50.6 *corpus*. SIMPLICIUS, *Commentaire sur les Catégories d’Aristote*, vol. II, trad. Guillaume de Moerbeke, ed. A. Pattin, Louvain, Publications universitaires de Louvain ; Paris, B. Nauwelaerts (coll. “Corpus Latinum commentariorum in Aristotelem Graecorum,” 1-2) 1971-1975, De Qualitate, p. 330-331, l. 81-94. This *Commentary* is also employed elsewhere for understanding dispositions, see Vivian BOLAND, “Aquinas and Simplicius on Dispositions — A Question in Fundamental Moral Theory,” *New Blackfriars*, 82, 968 (October 2001), p. 467-478 ; for Thomas’ use of Simplicius more generally, see W.J. HANKEY, “Thomas’ Neoplatonic Histories : His following of Simplicius,” *Dionysius*, 20 (2002), p. 153-178.

70. *ST* 1-2.61.5 *obj.* 1 ; on Bonaventure in *Collationes in Hexaemeron* 6, see HOCHSCHILD, “Porphyry, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas,” p. 248-259.

71. HOCHSCHILD, “Porphyry, Bonaventure and Thomas Aquinas,” p. 253.

72. *ST* 1.1.1 *obj.* 2.



any further knowledge.”<sup>73</sup> The philosophical sciences providing this complete account are attributed to Aristotle, but, because of the Islamic Arabic mediation of The Philosopher, the philosophical world is established over against what is made known by religious revelation. As Alain de Libera puts it, the Arabs mediated the texts of Aristotle to the Latins as “a total philosophic corpus, into which the whole of Hellenistic thought, profoundly neoplatonised, had surreptitiously crept.”<sup>74</sup>

This totality for theory has a matching totality in human power, ordered by the virtues, which the Porphyrian schema allows us to extend through all the steps from the human to the divine. As a result, for Aquinas, the one true human good, happiness enjoyed by the contemplation of the divine, is given in a two ways : one by philosophy which accomplishes its work in this present life, the other by way of revelation, whose goal is not enjoyed until we are *in patria*.<sup>75</sup> Although the first way is imperfect, the second and perfect way requires what the first accomplishes. Thomas puts it thus in his most complete treatment of the sciences, philosophical and revealed, and of their relations, the *Super Boetium De Trinitate* :

Human happiness is two-fold : one is imperfect, which is while we are on the way, about this The Philosopher speaks. This consists in the contemplation of separate substances by means of the habit of Wisdom. It is, however, imperfect, and of such a kind as we can have while journeying toward our homeland, so that the essence of the separate substances is not known. The other perfect happiness is in the homeland, where God himself will be seen through his essence and the other separate substances will be seen. But this happiness will not be by way of some speculative science, rather, through the light of glory.<sup>76</sup>

Earlier in the work Thomas had used the authority of Augustine to maintain that all human life is directed to happiness : “For, as Augustine says in the 19<sup>th</sup> book of the *De Ciuitate Dei*, quoting Varro, “There is no other reason for a man to philosophise except to be happy.”<sup>77</sup> Importantly for our questions, in the *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, as late as the *Super De Trinitate* is early, he connects our one aim, happiness, to the unity of the sciences and to the domination in them of Wisdom :

---

73. *ST* 1.1.1 *obj.* 1 ; for the significance of this beginning within Thomas’ world, see Fergus KERR, *After Aquinas : Versions of Thomism*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2002, p. 12-14.

74. Alain de LIBERA, *Penser*, p. 20. For brief description of this Aristotelianism, see ID., *La querelle des universaux : De Platon à la fin du Moyen Âge*, Paris, Seuil (coll. “Des travaux”), 1996, p. 117 and 68-124. See also Ewert H. COUSINS, “The Indirect Influence of the Koran on the Notion of Reason in the Christian Thought of the Thirteenth Century,” in *Actas del V Congreso Internacional de Filosofía Medieval*, vol. I, Madrid, Editora Nacional, 1979, p. 651-656.

75. Denis J.M. BRADLEY, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good : Reason and Human Happiness in Aquinas’s Moral Science*, Washington, Catholic University Press, 1997 ; and KERR (*After Aquinas*, p. 119-120) may be right that we cannot extract a purely philosophical ethics from Thomas’ theology because he interpreted Aristotle’s ideas for human happiness in Christian terms, but it is crucial that Aquinas did not understand himself to have done so and, therefore, gave a real necessity and a real power to natural virtue.

76. AQUINAS, *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, 6.4 ad 3, p. 171, l. 176-185 : *duplex est felicitas hominis : una imperfecta, que est in uia ; de qua loquitur Philosophus, et hec consistit in contemplatione substantiarum separatarum per habitum sapientie, imperfecta tamen, et tali qualis in uia est possibilis, ut non sciatur ipsorum quiditas. Alia est perfecta in patria, in qua ipse Deus per essentiam uidebitur et alie substantie separate ; set hec felicitas non erit per aliquam scientiam speculatiuam, set per lumen glorie.*

77. *Ibid.*, 5.1 ad 4.

Omnes autem scientiae et artes ordinantur in unum, scilicet ad hominis perfectionem, quae est eius beatitudo. Unde necesse est, quod una earum sit aliarum omnium rectrix, quae nomen sapientiae recte vindicat. Nam sapientis est alios ordinare.<sup>78</sup>

As we shall note again, Aristotle's subordination of the other sciences to Wisdom is the source of Thomas' notion of the *ancilla theologiae*. Perfect felicity as much requires the ordered efforts which pursue the imperfect happiness for which we strive by our natural powers as it exceeds them. The connection and distinction between the two satisfactions of our single desire is worked out in many places, and include a demonstration that both faith and reason demand that humans see the essence of God.<sup>79</sup> This from his most richly learned commentary, composed near the end of his life, the *Super Librum De Causis Expositio* states it most succinctly :

Oportet [...] quod ultima felicitas hominis quae in hac vita haberi potest, consistat in consideratione primarum causarum, quia illud modicum quod de eis scire potest, est magis amabile et nobilius omnibus his quae de rebus inferioribus cognosci possunt, ut patet per PHILOSOPHUM [...] ; secundum autem quod haec cognitio in nobis perficitur post hanc vitam, homo perfecte beatus constituitur [...].<sup>80</sup>

The knowing which philosophy seeks will be perfected in us after this life : our proper human aim and labours are presupposed not destroyed. Thomas is explicit about this in his *Super Boetium De Trinitate* which may be compared to the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* of Bonaventure as a tracing of the stages and forms of the soul's ascent by way of the diverse sciences :

The gifts of grace are added to nature in such a way that nature is not destroyed but is greatly perfected. Hence, even the light of faith, which flows into us by grace, does not destroy the light of the natural reason divinely bestowed on us.<sup>81</sup>

The light of nature is divinely given to us.

In the *Prima Pars*, Aquinas says that we see and judge all things in God, because "this natural light of reason is a certain participation of the divine light."<sup>82</sup> The whole massive *Pars Secunda* of the *Summa Theologiae*, describing the human in its desire for happiness, both in terms of what nature understands, seeks, and does, and also in terms of what grace gives, is set under the idea of the human as "principle of its own works" (*suorum operum principium*), because it is *imago dei*. Because we are self-moved, Thomas must treat the world humans make by beginning with human purpose and the human end, happiness. The questions of the relation between perfect and imperfect happiness, and of the powers by which they are possessed, arise in many forms, and Aquinas asks directly : "Utrum homo per sua naturalia possit acquirere beatitudinem ?" The Porphyrian principle that an intellectual being knows what is

78. AQUINAS, *In Metaphysicorum proemium*, 1.

79. *ST* 1.12.1.

80. AQUINAS, *Super Librum De Causis Expositio*, ed. H.-D. Saffrey, Fribourg, Louvain, Société philosophique (coll. "Textus Philosophici Friburgenses," 4/5), 1954, proemium 2, l. 5-11.

81. AQUINAS, *Super De Trinitate* 2.3 corpus, 98, l. 114-118 : *Dicendum, quod dona gratiarum hoc modo nature adduntur, quod eam non tollunt set magis perficiunt ; unde et lumen fidei, quod nobis gratis infunditur, non destruit lumen naturalis rationis diuinitus nobis inditum.*

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

above and below it “according to the mode of its own substance” (*secundum modum substantiae suae*) Aquinas draws from the *Liber de Causis* in order to show that we cannot have divine knowledge, and thus perfect happiness, by our powers, but rather : “the imperfect happiness which is able to be had in this life, humans are able to acquire by means of what they possess naturally, in the way that they also possess virtue, in the activity of which it consists.”<sup>83</sup>

How grace effects something beyond our power is not made known until the *Tertia Pars*. Within the *Secunda Secundae*, when asking about the sin of curiosity, Thomas tells us “knowledge of the truth, considered in itself, is good” (*ipsa enim veritatis cognitio, per se loquendi, bona est*). Knowledge of the truth is sinful only accidentally. He uses Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, to argue that the human good consists in the perfect knowing of the highest truth.<sup>84</sup> Finally he tells us that “the study of philosophy for its own sake, is both allowable and praise-worthy, because the truth which the philosophers grasp, is revealed to them by God, as the *Epistle to the Romans* 1.19 says.”<sup>85</sup> The same authority demanded that the existence of God “is proved by the philosophers with unbreakable reasons.”<sup>86</sup> He understands Aristotle and Plato to teach this so far as they maintain that our knowledge of God is a certain participation in the divine self-knowing. This doctrine Aquinas finds in the *Metaphysics* as well as the *Nicomachean Ethics* and he takes it to be the condition of metaphysics as knowledge of divinity.<sup>87</sup>

Within the treatise on the virtues, Aquinas is clear that grace adds something to presupposed natural powers. For example, having established earlier that humans have natural habits caused in them by their acts,<sup>88</sup> in contrast to these he asks : “Whether any virtues are infused in man by God ?” The necessity of infused virtues is consequent on their providing the means to a higher end : “there are some habits by which a man is well disposed to an end exceeding the power of human nature.” This end is not to be confused with ends within his powers, rather “est ultima et perfecta hominis beatitudo.”<sup>89</sup> The moral virtues are contradistinguished from the infused theological virtues : “It must be said that theological virtues are above humans [...]. Therefore, they are not properly called human, but super-human or divine virtues.”<sup>90</sup> In contrast, Bérulle’s spiritual revolution, creating a radically new Christocentric Catholicism, was based in a reinterpretation of the formula of Chalcedon. Christ is un-

83. *ST* 1-2.5.5 *corpus* : *beatitudo imperfecta quae in hac vita haberi potest, potest ab homine acquiri per sua naturalia eo modo quo et virtus, in cuius operatione consistit.*

84. *ST* 2-2.167.1 *corpus* and *ad* 1.

85. *ST* 2-2.167.1 *ad* 3 : *studium philosophiae secundum se est licitum et laudibile, propter veritatem quam philosophi perceperunt, Deo illis revelante, ut dicitur Ad Rom. 1.19.*

86. AQUINAS, *Questiones Disputatae de Veritate*, 10.12 *corpus*, p. 340, l. 137-139 : *rationibus irrefragabilibus etiam a philosophis probatum* ; and *ST* 1.2.2 *sed contra*.

87. See AQUINAS, *In Metaphysicorum* 1.3, p. 18-20, § 60-68 ; ID., *In librum Beati Dionysii de divinis nominibus expositio*, 1.1, p. 7-11, § 17-39 ; ID., *Sententia Libri Ethicorum*, 10.11, p. 587-588, l. 60-164.

88. *ST* 1-2.51.1 and 2.

89. *ST* 1-2.51.4 *corpus*.

90. *ST* 1-2.61.1 *ad* 2 : *Dicendum quod virtutes theologiae sunt supra hominem [...]. Unde non proprie dicuntur virtutes humanae, sed super-humanae, vel divinae.*

derstood as sacrificing his humanity to his divinity from all eternity. Of course, especially after the 19<sup>th</sup> century Neoscholastic revival,<sup>91</sup> efforts were made to assimilate this to Thomism. In fact, Bérulle's strategies in the war against Protestantism and modern secularity were the direct opposite of Thomas' in his confrontation with autonomous philosophy and neo-Augustinian reaction four hundred years earlier, and reconciling Bérulle and Thomas on the union of the human and divine in the Incarnation required a lot of stretching. The destruction of the natural by the supernatural, which Hadot was taught as Thomism by the Sulpicians, and the abnegation of the human and its natural powers, in which Hadot was trained by them, move in the opposite direction from the doctrine of Thomas himself. His borrowings from Porphyry help him to establish a hierarchy where the higher does not destroy the lower. As we shall see next, what derives to Aquinas from Iamblichus and his successors has the same effect.

### V. IAMBlichus AND AQUINAS : PHILOSOPHER, THEOLOGIAN, AND THEURGIST<sup>92</sup>

Carlos Steel tells us that, for Iamblichus, "the philosopher is not only a theologian (one who reveals the divine) but also a theurgist (one who performs divine acts)."<sup>93</sup> For Aquinas, the necessity and possibility of moral virtues, which lie within our natural powers, inheres in a philosophical knowledge of reality and in a desire for happiness which falls short of what he as a Christian regards as the "ultimate and perfect human beatitude." It is clear that Aquinas was, like Iamblichus, a theologian. His principle works are *summae* of *sacra doctrina*. He was also a priest : his eucharistic piety was celebrated and he was associated with the same kind of marvels that fill the biographies of the heads of the Neoplatonic schools. Like Iamblichus, he was observed levitating.<sup>94</sup> What we call the supernatural is active here. The questions we must ask of both Iamblichus and Aquinas, are : Whether and how in such a setting, philosophy retains its integrity ? and, Whether and how it retains the character of spiritual exercise ? or Has it instead become abstract theory, only producing concepts for an extraneous theology ? The answer lies in the same place where we found it when we asked whether moral virtue has natural integrity within a religious cosmos

---

91. G. YELLE, *Le Mystère de la sainteté du Christ selon le cardinal Pierre de Bérulle*, Montréal, Grand Séminaire (coll. "Theologica Montis Regii," 1), 1938, p. 45, n. 1 and p. 144-145, recognizes the difference, even the opposition, between Bérulle and Aquinas ; R. BELLEMARE, *Le sens de la créature dans la doctrine de Bérulle*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 1959, especially p. 124-125, 152-153 n. 76, 156-157 n. 81, 169, tries a rapprochement, but concedes that the Thomism of Bérulle is Cajetanian and that "quand saint Thomas est augustinien, Bérulle est thomiste" (p. 157).

92. For the texts from Iamblichus this study includes, I am grateful to Fr Hans Feichtinger.

93. Carlos STEEL, *The Changing Self. A Study on the Soul in Later Neoplatonism : Iamblichus, Damascius and Priscianus*, Brussels, Paleis der Academiën, 1978, p. 157.

94. On Iamblichus, see M. EDWARDS, *Neoplatonic Saints. The Lives of Plotinus and Proclus by their Students*, Liverpool, Liverpool University Press (coll. "Translated Texts for Historians," 35), 2000, p. XXIX ; on Aquinas, Guillelmo DE TOCCO, *Vita S. Thomas Aquinatis*, c. XXXIII, in D. PRÜMMER, ed., *Fontes Vitae S. Thomae Aquinatis*, Toulouse, 1911.

where the highest virtues are infused by grace. The key is the Neoplatonic principle that the same realities are repeated at different levels according to different modes.

Gregory Shaw speculates that in contrast to Iamblichus :

[...] one reason Plotinus has been favored by recent generations of scholars — if not by the Platonists themselves — is because his doctrine of the undescended soul, in a highly secularized form, more closely resembles our post-Enlightenment optimism (and hubris) about the capacities of rationality and our independence from ritualistic superstitions.<sup>95</sup>

Hadot's former attraction to what he calls the Plotinian "purely philosophical mysticism," in his own flight from the ritualistic superstitions he found both in the Catholicism of his early years, and in Iamblichus and Proclus, has a connection with this post-Enlightenment attitude. Plotinus is, however, as Hadot came to recognise, not really the friend of the human. He wrote of the good man :

[He] will altogether separate himself, as far as possible from his lower nature and will not live the life of the good man which civic virtue requires. He will leave that behind, and choose another, the life of the gods : for it is to them, not to the good men, that we are to be made like.<sup>96</sup>

In *Ennead* 5.3, Plotinus' last description of illumination by the One,<sup>97</sup> he tells us that the one who knows himself is double, one reasoning, having knowledge according to soul :

[...] and one up above this man, who knows himself according to Intellect because he has become that intellect ; and by that Intellect he thinks himself again, not any longer as a man [...].<sup>98</sup>

When, at the end of the treatise, we mount beyond Intellect to the One, the language is denuded of any rational self-elevation.<sup>99</sup> Plotinus speaks of belief in a way which suggests to Philippe Hoffmann that it may have inspired Proclus' teaching on faith.<sup>100</sup> Plotinus says that there is a "sudden reception of a light" which compels the soul "to believe" that "it is from Him, it is Him." There is a breaking in ; the illumination "comes." With this arrival of the "true end of the soul," it "contemplates the light by which it sees," but it is equally no longer operating by a power over which it has control.<sup>101</sup> Hadot's analyses of Plotinian mysticism make clear this loss, not of the true self, but of a self-possessed power ; he writes that "c'est l'irruption dans la conscience de toute une activité dont l'âme était inconsciente."<sup>102</sup> Again :

---

95. SHAW, "After Aporia," p. 36.

96. *Ennead* 1.2.7, l. 23-28.

97. Cf. PLOTIN, *Traité 49 (V.3)*, introduction, traduction, commentaire et notes par Bertrand Ham, *Les écrits de Plotin publiés dans l'ordre chronologique*, Paris, Cerf, 2000, p. 17.

98. *Ennead* 5.3.4, l. 8-12.

99. See Ham's comments at PLOTIN, *Traité 49*, p. 274.

100. P. HOFFMANN, "La triade Chaldaïque εἶδος, ἀλήθεια, πίστις de Proclus à Simplicius," in *Proclus et la théologie platonicienne*, p. 469.

101. PLOTIN, *Traité 49*, p. 17, l. 29-38. In ARMSTRONG's Loeb edition this is *Ennead* 5.3.17, l. 28-38.

102. PLOTIN, *Traité 9 : VI*, 9, p. 43.

[...] l'expérience mystique elle-même est un bouleversement de l'être qui est d'un tout autre ordre que les préparations qui y disposent. Par ailleurs, il ne suffit pas de se préparer. L'expérience est en effet une chance qui n'est pas donnée à tout de monde [...].<sup>103</sup>

The irruption in the consciousness “fait en quelque sorte exploser la conscience [...] on a l'impression d'appartenir à un autre.”<sup>104</sup>

This kind of description moves Jean-Marc Narbonne to ask if there is, in Neoplatonism : “un abandon du terrain propre de la philosophie.” After conceding that Platonism generally is “une combinaison de savoir et révélation,” he concludes that “les néoplatoniciens conçoivent la philosophie comme une servante oblige [...] d'une vision divine qui à la fois appelle son concours et ne dépend pas entièrement de lui. Plotin est très net sur ce point.”<sup>105</sup> Philosophy cannot give the end for which it prepares us :

La philosophie, dans le néoplatonisme, aboutit donc à sa propre auto-suppression, et doit s'incliner devant une expérience plus haute, à laquelle elle prépare, mais à l'étrangeté de laquelle rien comme tel ne prépare, puisque l'Un ne vient pas comme on l'attend [...].<sup>106</sup>

Another argument making the same point is given at length in Giovanni Catapano's *Epékeina tês philosophías : L'eticità del filosofare in Plotino*<sup>107</sup> which explores how Plotinus used “philosophy” and its cognate forms. Catapano concludes that for Plotinus himself there is a surpassing of philosophy and its moral value because its work prepares us for a good it cannot itself supply. Iamblichus continues this re-evaluation of the place of philosophy in the ascent of the soul ; *vis-à-vis* Plotinus, by placing it at the human rather than the divine level, he establishes philosophy more securely even as he limits it.

The hardest point for us to understand in respect to Iamblichus is how he can be both a divine theurge and a philosopher. There is a new attraction, especially among theologians, to what is seen as his absorption of philosophy into theurgic *poiêsis*. For example, John Milbank is satisfied to be linked with “the [Pseudo-]Dionysian legacy of theurgic neoplatonism.”<sup>108</sup> He then interprets Augustine so as to draw him toward an apophatic Neoplatonism realised in charity and *poiêsis*. He refuses my “contrast of a Porphyrian Augustine and a theurgic [pseudo] Dionysius.” Instead, Milbank asserts :

Augustine also places the soul within the cosmos and in the *Confessions* finally realises his own self hood through losing it in cosmic liturgy. Nor is the Augustinian *cogito* Cartesian, for in Augustine our certainty of our own being, life and understanding is a certainty

103. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

104. *Ibid.*, p. 48. See also his PLOTIN, *Traité* 38 : VI, 7.

105. Jean-Marc NARBONNE, “ΕΠΕΚΕΙΝΑ ΤΗΣ ΓΝΩΣΕΩΣ, le savoir d'au-delà du savoir chez Plotin et dans la tradition néoplatonicienne,” in *Metaphysik und Religion*, München, Leipzig, K.G. Saur, 2001, p. 487.

106. *Ibid.*, p. 488 ; see also J.-M. NARBONNE, *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis (Plotin-Proclus-Heidegger)*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres (coll. “L'Âne d'or”), 2001, p. 274-275.

107. Giovanni CATAPANO, *Ἐπέκεινα τῆς φιλοσοφίας. L'eticità del filosofare in Plotino*, Padova, CLEUP, 1995.

108. J. MILBANK, “Intensities,” *Modern Theology*, 15, 4 (October 1999), p. 485 (“Intensities” is, in part, a response to my “*Theoria versus Poiêsis*” in the same issue).

of intentional opening to these things, which are taken as innately transcendental realities, exceeding their instantiation in us. Thus no *res cogitans*, enclosed upon itself, is here reflexively established.<sup>109</sup>

The refusal to allow any real connection between the Augustinian and the Cartesian *cogito* is part of an endeavour to overcome metaphysics by means of theology. Milbank equally interprets Aquinas so as to collapse the theology which is part of philosophy into sacred doctrine.<sup>110</sup> In fact, however, Iamblichus is altogether concerned with keeping the levels of reality separate. Philosophy works with what the human can do within the limits given to it. Gregory Shaw writes :

There is in Iamblichus's Platonism a willingness to *identify* with the humiliation of the human condition [...]. Damascius's companion Isidore once remarked, after meeting a pretentious philosopher : "*Those who would be Gods must first become human !*" For the hieratic Platonists the limits of our humanity must be fully realised in order to recover our lost divinity.<sup>111</sup>

For Iamblichus, in contradistinction from Plotinus, Amelius, and Porphyry the human and the divine are not to be confused. Right doctrine,

[...] separates the Soul off [...] following upon Intellect, representing a distinct level of being [...] subsisting independently on its own, and it separates the soul from all the superior classes of being and assigns to it [...] [a] particular definition of its essence.<sup>112</sup>

Soul is in the middle, communicating life and being from the Intelligible realm to what is below. This place requires that the soul partakes of the opposed characteristics of what is above it and below it. The soul, by giving up her own life and throwing herself upon the gods, hands herself over to their power, which makes her become pure and unchanging, nonetheless, she does not become a god herself.<sup>113</sup> Union with the gods does not do away with the soul's individuality. Finamore and Dillon write, the soul "cannot become divine but only attached to the divine. It is permanently inferior."<sup>114</sup>

What moved Iamblichus to theurgy, namely, the conviction against Plotinus and Porphyry, in accord with Damascius, but more radically than Proclus,<sup>115</sup> that the individual human soul is altogether descended into the realm of *genesis*, requires him to embrace both theurgy and the work of philosophy for ascent toward the One. Any reader of the *Protrepticus* will know that it is an exhortation to the philosophical life with all its intellectual disciplines and moral virtues. A reader of the *De Mysteriis* will find both that upon which philosophy depends and what is beyond it. Philosophy pre-

109. *Ibid.*, n. 142, p. 497.

110. See my "Why Philosophy Abides for Aquinas," *The Heythrop Journal*, 42, 3 (2001), p. 329-348 ; and J. MILBANK, C. PICKSTOCK, *Truth in Aquinas*, London, New York, Routledge (coll. "Radical Orthodoxy"), 2001.

111. SHAW, "After Aporia," p. 41.

112. IAMBlichus, *De Anima*, Text, Translation and Commentary by J.F. Finamore and J.M. Dillon, Leiden, Boston, Köln, Brill (coll. "Philosophia Antiqua," 92), 2002, p. 31.

113. IAMBlichus, *De Mysteriis* [Des Places] 1.12, 40,16-41,4.

114. IAMBlichus, *De Anima* [Finamore and Dillon], p. 219.

115. SHAW, "After Aporia," p. 24.

supposes “an innate knowledge of the gods [which] is co-existent with our very essence ; and this knowledge is superior to all judgment and deliberate choice, and subsists prior to reason and demonstration.”<sup>116</sup> Moreover, theurgy, which surpasses philosophy as a way of union, is contrasted with it as “logical” and “theoretical.”<sup>117</sup> Exactly as for Aquinas, the philosophical sciences were essential to the self-knowledge by which the soul would uncover her innate *logoi* and, as for him, with Iamblichus, philosophy was the human activity in the ascent.<sup>118</sup> Iamblichus developed the curriculum of the Neoplatonic schools in which commentary on the treatises of Aristotle was an essential part of philosophy. Contact with the gods beyond where philosophy, limited by the bounds of the discursive mind could reach, “must be initiated by the gods themselves.”<sup>119</sup> Of these practices and judgments Aquinas was also an heir.

Because Iamblichus maintains the limits and distinctions, he has a strong sense of the need for *paideía*, with its moral effort, subordination, and work. He writes in the *Protrepticos* : “Whoever is not satisfied with merely living or vegetating will be ridiculous unless he undergoes every species of labour, and incurs trouble and vexation of every kind to acquire wisdom which enables him to know the truth.”<sup>120</sup> Just as you must be initiated into the small mysteries before you go on to the great, education comes before philosophy.<sup>121</sup> As an exhortation to philosophy, it is appropriate to the *Protrepticos* to give a greater emphasis to the human will than does the *De Mysteriis*. It teaches that “human are principles of their actions,” a description of the human which Aquinas repeats exactly, having derived it from John Damascene, and makes essential to our being the *imago dei*. Humans have “the inherent power to choose good and avoid the evil, the one not using this power is utterly unworthy of the privileges given him by nature [...]. We choose our own destiny and we are our own luck and *daimon*.”<sup>122</sup> Nonetheless, realising our freedom requires a long, gradual, and careful education.

The philosophical journey has its own path, methods, disciplines, satisfactions, and goals. Philosophy corresponds exactly to human nature, because it gives to the human soul that for which it is made. It does not bring us to the highest union, but its objects are not therefore unreal. Philosophy is for the human as human, it activates the best powers of the soul. By it we contemplate beings, and attain knowledge and understanding of all things. The soul is capable of philosophy because she has in herself the “system of universal reason.”<sup>123</sup> Philosophy is a striving for contemplation for which *paideía* with all its means prepares us.<sup>124</sup> Truth is the highest operation of the

116. IAMBlichus, *De Mysteriis* 1.3, 7, 12-8, 2.

117. *Ibid.*, 2.11, 96, 13-16, cf. 2.11, 97, 2-4.

118. SHAW, “After Aporia,” p. 26.

119. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

120. IAMBlichus, *Protrepticos* [Des Places], 8.5, 77, 7-11.

121. *Ibid.*, 2.3, 43, 8-10.

122. *Ibid.*, 3.5, 45, 8-16 : “ἀρχαὶ τῶν πράξεων εἰσιν [...] αὐτοὶ ἑαυτοῖς ἔσμεν ἐν τύχῃ τάξει καὶ δαίμονος.”

123. *Ibid.*, 4.5-7, 50, 23-52, 13.

124. IAMBlichus, *De Vita Pythagorica* 2.59.



highest part of the soul ; therefore, our ultimate human goal *qua* human must be contemplation.<sup>125</sup> As with Aquinas, intellectual activity is an end in itself ; it is “a part of virtue and felicity : for we affirm that felicity either is from this or is this.”<sup>126</sup> Iamblichus repeats Aristotle, just as Aquinas will do : “In a perfect and free activity itself there is a pleasure, so that theoretic activity or contemplation is the most pleasant or delightful of all.”<sup>127</sup> Being an end in itself, contemplation may never be turned around and used for an inferior purpose.<sup>128</sup>

There is, however, a yet higher union with the divine. Precisely, as power or act of the human as human, philosophy is denied the capacity to bring about true union. Knowledge is not the whole of virtue and of happiness, but a part of it. Therefore, for Iamblichus, happiness necessarily includes the noetic dimension, but cannot be reduced to it.<sup>129</sup> All philosophy is based on a prayerful relation to god, and its ultimate goal is to “follow god.”<sup>130</sup> Although it reaches true contemplation, it is moved by a further desire, one that draws the soul closer to god, yearning for a contemplation where its activity and end are no longer divided. This beatitude is prepared for humans by the gods.<sup>131</sup> Philosophy is the way to that perfect end and anticipates it, but the human activity which it requires must finally give way to an activity towards us and in us of the gods. Ultimately, the soul can only have perfect felicity when separated from the body ; she must in the end be receptive and must not oppose the liberation from the body.<sup>132</sup> The ultimate goal is beyond theoretical knowledge and lies in the soul’s association with the gods, in returning to being and revolution in communion with the gods, as she was before the soul’s incarnation.<sup>133</sup> Aquinas will agree with Iamblichus that, while we are in this present body, we cannot enjoy perfect human happiness.

In Iamblichean Neoplatonism, there must be, and there is, a mediatorial hierarchy. In working out this mediation, psychology coheres with what we might call the gracious activity of the gods towards us. Thus, to put it in Christian terms, there are a revealed theology, sacramentally enacted, soteriology, and a hierarchical spiritual community. Equally, however, on the side of the human activity of the ascending soul, there are also ontology, a cosmology, and mathematics. Because of the descent of the individual soul, self-knowledge and knowledge of the divine cannot be immediate. They require philosophy, with its moral propaedeutic, physics and mathematics, as well as metaphysics. In this tradition, the greatest systematizer of the philosophical sciences for the sake of the self-knowledge which leads to the knowledge of

---

125. IAMBlichus, *Protrepticos* 7.6, 72,22-73,9.

126. *Ibid.*, 7.8, 73,24-26.

127. *Ibid.*, 11.7,88,1-8.

128. *Ibid.*, 5.24, 66,12-28 ; cf. 5.20, 65,12-18.

129. *Ibid.*, 7.8, 73,22-26.

130. IAMBlichus, *De Vita Pythagorica* 18.86 ; 28.137.

131. IAMBlichus, *Protrepticos* 3.10, 47,27f.

132. *Ibid.*, 13.12, 97,17-22.

133. *Ibid.*, 3.10, 47,25-28 ; 3.11, 58,8-19.

God is Proclus. It is supposed that his work stands as a high point on a line, which begins with Aristotle and moves through Iamblichus and Syrianus (who distinguished the three-fold stages of the universal), tracing the development of a hierarchy of the sciences. This system of the sciences will eventually come to Aquinas by way of the Arabs.<sup>134</sup> Thomas, with an Aristotelian psychology in many ways like that of Iamblichus and Proclus, continues their mediatorial hierarchy. Distinguishing philosophical and revealed theologies, he matches a kind of virtue to each, but in such a way as to actually strengthen philosophical rationality.

Two Neoplatonic principles, one Porphyrian in origin, the other Iamblichian, and both found by Aquinas in Dionysius, require that we humans know in our own proper way, *i.e.* rationally. These laws are respectively that “a thing is known according to the mode of the receiver,” and the requirement for complete mediation, the so-called *Lex divinitatis*. Human 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.”<sup>135</sup> The human power and mode of knowing is situated midway in a hierarchy ; the most revealing and determinative account of the universe is as a hierarchy of cognitive powers where we have the animals below us and all the ranks of angels above.<sup>136</sup> This schema limits the human but, nonetheless, gives it a determined place, character, and power. There is no abolition or absorption into the angelic or divine, nor, for Aquinas, a dissolution of the difference between philosophy, which belongs to our natural powers, and sacred doctrine, which depends upon what is beyond these.

Augustine had spoken of Christianity as “true philosophy.”<sup>137</sup> Following him, when philosophy is identified with *intellectus* or wisdom, an identification Eriugena explicitly made on Augustine’s authority, and when *fides* gives us the same content but in a form inadequate to reason, we arrive at Anselm’s *fides quaerens intellectum*, which silently quotes Augustine.<sup>138</sup> The silence of Anselm in respect to authorities is

---

134. See D.G. MACISAAC, “Projection and Time in Proclus,” in John INGLIS, ed., *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism and Christianity*, p. 83-105 ; A. de LIBERA, *La querelle*, p. 103-109 ; J.J. O’CLEARY, “The Role of Mathematics in Proclus’ Theology,” in *Proclus et la théologie platonicienne*, p. 75-76 ; 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), p. 249-269 ; ID., “Abstraction, séparation et objet de la métaphysique,” in L. LANGLOIS, J.-M. NARBONNE, ed., *Actes du XXVII<sup>e</sup> Congrès de l’Association des Sociétés de Philosophie de Langue Française. La métaphysique : son histoire, sa critique, ses enjeux*, Paris, Vrin ; Québec, PUL (coll. “Zêtésis”), 2000, p. 217-223 ; D.J. O’MEARA, “La science métaphysique (ou théologie) de Proclus comme exercice spirituel,” in *Proclus et la théologie platonicienne*, p. 279-290.

135. *De Veritate* 15.1 corpus, vol. II, p. 480, l. 356-358. See *ad* 2 and *ad* 8 of this article, as well as the whole of 15.2 and 8.2 *ad* 3.

136. See W.J. HANKEY, “Aquinas, Pseudo-Denys, Proclus and Isaiah VI.6,” *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 64 (1997), p. 59-93 ; and Houston SMIT, “Aquinas’s Abstractionism,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, 10 (2001), p. 97-103.

137. AUGUSTINE, *Contra Julianum* 4.14.72 ; see *De Vera Religione* 5.8.

138. ERIUGENA, *De divina predestinatione* I, PL 357-358 [*Treatise on Divine Predestination*, trans. Mary Brennan, Notre Dame, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press (coll. “Notre Dame texts in Medieval Culture,”

intentional ; *intellectus* surpasses what we know on authority. When, in its inward and upward quest for God, the soul finds its deiform rationality, it knows, through the structure of its own reasoning, the content of faith according to *rationes necessariae*. The existence and attributes of God, the Trinity, and the Incarnation become a series of *intelligibilia* known independently of faith.<sup>139</sup> Only thus known are they properly known.

Aquinas dealt with the massive invasion in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries of the Aristotelian corpus of sciences by treating philosophy in the opposite way. For the Arabic philosophers through whom the philosophical corpus was transmitted, prophesy belonged to representation and to a faculty inferior to reason. Thomas followed both them and his Augustinian predecessors by distinguishing between the modalities of faith and reason. This done, he turns the tables in respect to both. For the first time in the Latin Middle Ages, a theologian engaged the philosophers on their own terrain as a separate, limited, and subordinate sphere, and, in opposition both to the Arabs and the Augustinians, Thomas made a humbled but quasi-autonomous philosophy into the servant of revealed theology.<sup>140</sup> In the mediaeval university this difference of knowledge and method involved a difference of place. The Faculty of Arts was “the city of philosophers”<sup>141</sup> which has a measure of self-government. Practicing philosophy as commentary according to methods he learned from Greek and Arab Neoplatonists and Peripatetics, Thomas rectified philosophy from within its own logic and history.<sup>142</sup> He was valued within the city of philosophy and, indeed, denounced by his Augustinian adversaries for having conceded too much to it, his teaching was condemned by ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>143</sup>

---

5), 1998, c. 1, § 1, p. 7-8]; and ANSELM, *Prosligion* c. 1 [F.S. SCHMITT, *S. Anselmi Opera Omnia*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, Frommann, 1968, vol. 1, p. 100].

139. See ANSELM, *Prosligion* c. 4 [Schmitt, vol. 1, p. 104] in respect to the existence of God ; the *Monologion* deduces the Trinity and the *Cur Deus Homo* the Incarnation. For method, see the *Prologus* of the *Monologion* [Schmitt, vol. 1, p. 7] ; in the *Prologus* of the *Prosligion* the requirement of deiformity is made. For an analysis of the logic of the quest see W.J. HANKEY, “*Secundum rei vim vel secundum cognoscentium facultatem* : Knower and Known in the *Consolation of Philosophy* of Boethius and the *Prosligion* of Anselm,” in J. INGLIS, ed., *Medieval Philosophy and the Classical Tradition in Islam, Judaism and Christianity*, p. 134-141.
140. See Alain de LIBERA, *La philosophie médiévale*, Paris, PUF, 1993<sup>2</sup>, p. 411 ; HANKEY, “Why Philosophy Abides,” p. 329-348 ; on Aquinas, *ST* 1.1.5 *ad 2*, see R.D. CROUSE, “St. Thomas, St. Albert, Aristotle : *Philosophia Ancilla Theologiae*,” in *Atti del Congresso Internazionale Tommaso nel suo settimo centenario*, I, Naples, Edizioni Domenicane Italiane, 1975, p. 181-185.
141. I. AERTSEN, “Aquinas’s Philosophy in its Historical Setting,” in N. KREZMANN, E. STUMP, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 24 and see p. 20-21.
142. For what he did, and how he did it, see THOMAS D’AQUIN, *L’unité de l’intellect contre les Averroïstes suivis des textes contre Averroës antérieurs à 1270*, texte latin, traduction, introduction, biographie, chronologie, notes et index par A. de Libera, Paris, Flammarion, 1997<sup>2</sup> ; and HANKEY, “Thomas’ Neoplatonic Histories” and “Why Philosophy Abides.”
143. See Fergus KERR, “Thomas Aquinas”, in G.R. EVANS, ed., *The Medieval Theologians*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2001, p. 207 ; *La Condamnation Parisienne de 1277*, nouvelle éd. du texte latin, traduction, introduction et commentaire par David Piché, Paris, Vrin (coll. “Sic et Non”), 1999, art. 89, p. 107 ; F.-X. PUTALLAZ, R. IMBACH, *Profession philosophe : Siger de Brabant*, p. 171-172 ; and Alain BOUREAU, *Théologie, science et censure au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Le cas de Jean Peckham*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres (coll. “L’Âne d’or”), 1999.

In return for giving philosophy an autonomy, faith now knew things philosophy could never reach. The dignity of *sacra doctrina* and its difference from a philosophical science, even the highest, required that the sacred theologian maintain his distance. In Aquinas' view, the demand of his Augustinian adversaries that things which only faith could know — the temporal beginning of the world, the Trinity, an universal, individual, and immediate providence, the Incarnation — be rationally proved brought error and disrepute to theology and undermined confidence in what philosophy really could accomplish. He found this argument in Moses Maimonides, but Aquinas certainly learned from the intense debate on the relations of scripture and philosophy carried out within mediaeval Islam and Judaism generally.<sup>144</sup> Great dispute continues about the kind of autonomy philosophy had for Aquinas. The "Christian philosophy" of Étienne Gilson's anti-modernism has been succeeded by the postmodern efforts of Jean-Luc Marion, and John Milbank, and many others, which endeavour an even more radical reduction of philosophy to theology.<sup>145</sup> Nonetheless, Thomas' *sortie* into philosophy's *camp de Mars* in the Faculty of Arts was crucial to the expansion of the mind of Western Christendom that made it the mother of secular modernity. Moreover, as I hope to show in the last part of this paper, limiting the power of natural reason is not at all for Aquinas a diminution of the human.

## VI. THOMISTIC ANTHROPOLOGY

When, in beginning the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas proposed another teaching beyond the philosophical account of every kind of being, including the divine, he did not suppose that the necessity for *sacra doctrina* 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 simple unity of the First Cause, 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

---

144. MAIMONIDES, *Guide of the Perplexed* lib. 2, cap. 15ff. ; AQUINAS, *In 2 Sententiarum* dist. 1, q. 1, a. 5. Aquinas follows the exact position of Maimonides whom he cites at another place in the same article but "semble bien présenter une thèse de théologiens latins, appuyée, dit-il, sur un texte de saint Grégoire" (AQUINAS, *De Aeternitate Mundi*, Rome, Commissio Leonina, 43, 1976, p. 55\*). See T.B. NOONE, "The Originality of St. Thomas's Position on the Philosophers and Creation," *The Thomist*, 60 (1996), p. 295-299.

145. See J. MILBANK and C. PICKSTOCK, *Truth in Aquinas*, London, New York, Routledge (coll. "Radical Orthodoxy"), 2001 ; J.-L. MARION, "Saint Thomas d'Aquin et l'onto-théo-logie," *Revue thomiste*, 95, 1 (1995), p. 31-66 ; W.J. HANKEY, "Denys and Aquinas : Antimodern Cold and Postmodern Hot," in Lewis AYRES, Gareth JONES, ed., *Christian Origins : Theology, Rhetoric and Community*, London, New York, Routledge (coll. "Studies in Christian Origins"), 1998, p. 139-184 ; ID., "From Metaphysics to History ;" ID., "Theoria versus Poesis : Neoplatonism and Trinitarian Difference in Aquinas, John Milbank, Jean-Luc Marion and John Zizioulas," *Modern Theology*, 15, 4 (October 1999), p. 387-415 ; and ID., "Why Philosophy Abides."

without destroying their integrity. The difference of *sacra doctrina* from the philosophical sciences, including metaphysics, is one of genus.<sup>146</sup>

The philosophical sciences are *ancillae* to *sacra doctrina* but it is of great significance that this figure is taken from within philosophy, from Aristotle and his schema for subordinating the particular sciences to metaphysics. The transfer of this scheme to the relation between the two theologies, philosophical and scriptural, lies, as Robert Crouse writes :

[...] in the recognition by Christian doctors, of a genuine and coherent expression of divine science in the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle. After such a recognition, one could no longer suppose that Aristotle's theological importance consisted only in the provision of logical instruments for the exegesis of revealed wisdom [...] the relationship between the two forms of theology could be no more external than the relationship between physics and metaphysics.<sup>147</sup>

This internal connection of philosophy to a divine wisdom which remains a science gives it the work of raising the mind toward the divine, indeed of bringing out its deformity more profoundly than for Iamblichus. Aquinas, in contradiction from Iamblichus,<sup>148</sup> held and supposed Aristotle to have held, that the *nous poiêtikos* was individuated, the possession of every human mind. It is the activity of uncreated given to us ; Thomas writes that the light : “of which Aristotle speaks is immediately impressed on us by God.”<sup>149</sup> The immediate connection in this intellectual light between a power we possess as creatures and God has been importantly taken up by Houston Smit in order to reconcile Aquinas with Augustine's innatism and doctrine of illumination. Smit asks us to attend to Thomas' “identification of the agent intellect with the ‘connatural light of our souls’ (*SCG* 2.77 [5]).” For Aquinas, “this light [...] is ‘nothing more than a participating likeness in the uncreated light, in which all the divine ideas are contained’ (*ST* 1a.84.6).”<sup>150</sup> Smit begins with an account of Thomas' views on the limitations of sensory cognition. Continuing on this Platonic road, he goes on to the “Hierarchy of the Spiritual Light and the Nature of the Intellect,” which in effect (although Smit does not know the source) gives us Thomas' version of the Neoplatonic hierarchy of being as a graduated series of participated intellectual acts. The creation of abstracted universals in the soul is a participation in the divine self-knowledge insofar as the power which makes this divine-human act possible is an uncreated light which we possess in a created participation. “[T]he agent intellect can make sensible forms actually intelligible only in virtue of its containing virtually,

---

146. *ST* 1.1.1 *ad* 2, see J.F. WIPPEL, *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas*, Washington, Catholic University of America Press, 1984, p. 18.

147. CROUSE, “St. Thomas,” p. 183-184 ; see ID., “*Philosophia Ancilla Theologiae* : Some texts from Aristotle's *Metaphysica* in the Interpretation of Albertus Magnus,” *Actas del V Congreso Internacional de Filosofia Medieval*, vol. I, Madrid, Editora Nacional, 1979, p. 657-661.

148. SHAW, “After Aporia,” p. 22.

149. AQUINAS, *Quaestio Disputata de Spiritualibus Creaturis*, ed. J. Cos, Rome, Paris, Commissio Leonina, 2000, 10 *corpus*, p. 107, l. 325-327.

150. SMIT, “Aquinas's Abstractionism,” p. 88.

as a participating likeness in the divine light, cognition of the divine being” in the soul’s knowledge of the transcendentals.<sup>151</sup> Professor Smit concludes :

[...] the intelligible forms that come to inform our intellects [...] are [...] produced through our share in the divine spiritual light. This connatural light of our souls produces these forms [...] only because all *scientia* pre-exists in it virtually and universally, in partial active potency. [...] [the intellect] requires phantasms not because they already contain what we represent abstractly in concepts, but because [...] phantasms provide enough information to render distinct the content which pre-exists in its light in a “general and confused way.”<sup>152</sup>

Because, for Aquinas, when abstracting the forms of sensible things, we make the greatest and most common universals emerge in our minds, we strengthen the power by which we can approximate the knowledge of separate divine intellect. Because the light by which these makings come to be is not only derived from the divine uncreated light, but is also the agent power of each of our own minds, what we know in it and by it is ourselves. Thomas’ unification of the *Gnothi seauton* and the knowledge of God by bringing into knowledge what is implicit in the soul’s rational power, even as it is turned to the sensible, and by mounting from this toward the intelligible, and to participation in pure intellect, places him in a tradition in which Iamblichus unites Aristotelian science and Platonic reminiscence.<sup>153</sup>

If philosophical science draws us toward deiformity, theology as *sacra doctrina* returns the gift by strengthening reason. For Aquinas sacred doctrine has its origin in another light than the *lumen naturalis rationis*, this is the *lumen divinae revelationis*.<sup>154</sup> The reception of this additional light — not inherent but conferred by grace from outside — increases *ratio* by giving to it what lies beyond its scope. I note two reasons for this surprising result.

First, Thomas’ turn to what Scripture teaches beyond the reach of human reason for the sake of a saving knowledge of the divine is probably inscribed within a Dionysian paradigm for the origin of sacred theology. However, a comparison between the beginning of *The Divine Names* and the *Summa Theologiae* yields difference as much as likeness. *The Divine Names* refers the unknowability of God except as revealed to the fact that God is “beyond being” and thus “above and beyond speech, mind and being itself.” Union beyond illumination, and in contrast to knowledge — not union by intellectual activity — is what enables theology and this union is the perfection theology seeks.<sup>155</sup> Thomas will use Dionysian language and is clear that it is better to say that we know what God is not, rather than what God is, but he refuses to either to ascribe non-being to God,<sup>156</sup> or to replace the language of knowledge by

151. *Ibid.*, p. 105 and 112-113.

152. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

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

154. *ST* 1.1.1 *ad* 2.

155. DIONYSIUS, *Divine Names* 1.1 [588A].

156. *E.g.* *ST* 1.12.1 *ad* 3.

the language of union. In consequence, when beginning *sacra doctrina*, he does not save it from the scientific completeness of philosophy, by placing it in the sphere of affectivity and charity — where Franciscans will typically place it.<sup>157</sup> Rather, he makes it a science which addresses a knowledge to human reason and will in order that we can direct ourselves with a rational freedom toward the end which exceeds our natural knowledge and power. Thomas expresses this somewhat paradoxical solution thus :

The end [to which we are ordered] ought to be known to humans in advance because they must direct their intentions and actions so as to order them to this end. Hence it was necessary to human salvation that certain things became known through divine revelation which exceed human reason.<sup>158</sup>

We are related to an end beyond reason in such a way as to strengthen our reason and will by giving to them truths to know and goods to love higher than their natural capacities reach. The infusion of grace perfects the rational power. The light of nature is divinely given to us. We recollect again that the whole massive *Pars Secunda* of the *Summa Theologiae*, which describes the human in its desire for happiness, both in terms of what nature understands, seeks, and does, and in terms of what grace might give, is set under the idea of the human as *suorum operum principium* because it is *imago dei*.

Second, the ultimate account of human knowing for Aquinas comes not from Dionysius but from Augustine and the doctrine of the beatific vision he bequeathed the Latin Church. The most important discussion of beatitude occurs in Question 12 on how God is known by us ; there Aquinas makes his beginning by arguing that both philosophy and faith demand human vision of the essence of God. Without face-to-face knowledge, faith would be nullified because its purpose is human beatitude : “Since the final happiness of man consists in his highest activity, reasoning, if no created intellect could see God, either it would never achieve happiness, or its happiness would consist in something other than God. This is foreign to faith.”<sup>159</sup> Reason, in turn, would be denied. It is fulfilled in the knowledge of the principles and causes. This frustrated, man’s natural desire would be vain. Both faith and reason require that “the blessed see the essence of God.” In these questions, we also find Thomas’ notorious doctrine of created grace developed in order to explain how we can have the demanded knowledge of God’s essence. Much criticised, it is, nonetheless, determined by Thomas’ desire to preserve the integrity of human nature until the end, even when we are united to God. Problems with a human knowledge of the divine essence are the incapacity of the creature for the creator and of the human mind for the knowledge of separated substance. Because of the first, God cannot be adequately known through an intermediating likeness : no concept, by nature finite, can convey

---

157. See Chapter 7 of BONAVENTURE’S *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*.

158. *ST* 1.1.1 *corpus* : Finem autem oportet esse praecognitum hominibus qui suas intentiones et actiones debent ordinare in finem. Unde necessarium fuit homini ad salutem quod ei nota fierent quaedam per revelationem divinam quae rationem humanum excedunt.

159. *ST* 1.12.1. For a complete treatment of the issues involved in the relation of faith and reason here, see BRADLEY, *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good*.

the uncreated infinity. Beatifying union must be immediate. However, humans have some capacity for knowing separate substance and to this a gracious addition can be made :

Since the created intellect is made to apprehend naturally individualized form and concrete being abstractly by means of a certain power to separate out, it is able through grace to be raised so that it can know subsisting separated substance and separated subsistent being.<sup>160</sup>

Divine grace gives a power to the creature in order, by an addition to raise its natural created capacity beyond its natural limit. Grace continues, even at this absolute limit of creaturely existence, to conform itself to the specific nature of the creature. The *Lex divinitatis* is not broken. We shall be made “deiformis,” without ceasing to be human.<sup>161</sup>

In asserting the necessity of direct vision of God’s essence for human happiness, Aquinas sets Augustine against the Pseudo-Dionysius. Indeed, in his late exposition of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, Aquinas accuses Eriugena of heresy because Eriugena has absorbed the Dionysian negative theology more completely than Thomas will himself. Aquinas accuses Eriugena of denying that all the angels see God “per essentiam.” This was a mistake, Aquinas asserts, “de primis studentibus in libris Dionysii.” Such was “Ioannes Scotus, qui primo commentus in libros Dionysii. Sed haec opinio haeretica est [...]”<sup>162</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Presence, vision, essence, *theoria* are ultimate for Aquinas and *sacra doctrina* must respect the integrity of what philosophy demands. The human does not pass into the divine, but an addition is made to human power so that we can reach beyond ourselves. This is an exalted humanism. On the one hand, philosophy is not the totality of life, for Aquinas, as also it was not for Iamblichus and his fellows in the Middle and Neoplatonic schools. On the other hand, it did not cease to have its own proper integrity, powers, virtues, and ends. Although religion encompassed philosophy for pagan Neoplatonist and Christian scholastic, and although the intellectual felicity philosophy offered is surpassed by what grace adds, so that philosophy serves the higher theology, the service is not to produce concepts for another to use. There is nothing abstract about this theory ; it is a way of life which transforms us towards deiformity. Like its Neoplatonic predecessor, the mediaeval university contained philosophy as

---

160. *ST* 1.12.4 *ad* 3.

161. *ST* 1.12.5 *ad* 3.

162. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Super Epistolam ad Hebraeos Lectura*, in Raphael CAI, ed., *Super Epistolas S. Pauli Lectura*, vol. II, Taurin, Rome, Marietti, 1953, p. 354, § 85. On the late date for these commentaries amongst Thomas’ writings, see vol. I, p. VI. Significantly, this has recently been confirmed by the discovery of a reference to Proclus in the commentary on Colossians ; see Simon TUGWELL, *Albert and Thomas. Selected Writings*, New York, Paulist Press (coll. “The Classics of Western Spirituality”), 1988, p. 247, n. 472 ; and *Super Epistolam ad Colossenses Lectura*, in Raphael CAI, ed., *Super Epistolas S. Pauli Lectura*, p. 134, § 41-42 ; and W.J. HANKEY, “Aquinas, Pseudo-Denys,” p. 74.



*exercice spirituel* within a Christian spirituality which also directed intellectuals towards a supernatural felicity. Well into the Modern period, and in some countries even after the revolutions, the college within the university mediated religion, philosophy, and life for students and teachers together. As Ian Stewart has shown, in seventeenth-century Cambridge, the college don, as scholar-priest had an “authorised reason” by which he directed a meditative reading, self-consciously continuing the monastic tradition.<sup>163</sup> While an investigation of the balance of the elements in these communities relative to the Iamblichan and Porphyrian categories I have employed remains to be carried through, it is too early to judge that the worst features of the divorce between life and philosophy afflicting the contemporary university were already established in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

---

163. See, for example, in England, Ian G. STEWART, “Isaac Barrow : Authorised Reason and Reasonable Authority of a Scholar Priest” (unpublished doctoral thesis, Cambridge University, 1998), chapter 1. The scholarship on similar features of colleges elsewhere in Europe is also reviewed there. Happily in future work Dr Stewart is planning to deal with some of the questions my study has reopened.