



## Thomas Aquinas, Creation, and Two Historians

Lawrence Dewan

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Hommage à Edward Schillebeeckx

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## THOMAS AQUINAS, CREATION, AND TWO HISTORIANS

Lawrence DEWAN, O.P.

*RÉSUMÉ : Étienne Gilson disait que Thomas d'Aquin pensait que la doctrine de la causalité de l'être par Dieu n'était pas une doctrine de création. Aussi, Gilson se trouvait obligé de fournir un sens pour les passages où Thomas attribue à Aristote et même à Platon une connaissance de la cause de l'être universel. Gilson, en le faisant, a mal interprété des textes de Thomas. Il ne pouvait le faire que parce que sa propre compréhension de la doctrine de l'être créé chez Thomas d'Aquin laissait à désirer.*

*Anton Pegis a suivi Gilson en ceci, qu'il disait que Thomas n'a jamais attribué à Aristote une doctrine de création. Pourtant, il pensait que Thomas croyait que les principes d'Aristote lui-même mèneraient finalement à une telle doctrine. Pegis a essayé d'expliquer ce que Thomas disait de Platon et d'Aristote dans son *Traité des substances séparées* (ce que Gilson avait laissé sous silence). Je montre que Pegis a présenté sous un faux jour l'attitude de Thomas envers les deux philosophes dans cet ouvrage.*

*SUMMARY : Étienne Gilson held that Thomas Aquinas was aware that Aristotle's doctrine of divine causality of being was not a doctrine of creation. Gilson thus had to provide a meaning for those passages in which Thomas attributes to Aristotle, and even to Plato, a knowledge of the cause of being in all its universality. In doing so, Gilson actually gave a distorted interpretation of texts of Thomas. He could do so only because his own understanding of Thomas's conception of created being was faulty.*

*Anton Pegis agreed with Gilson that Thomas did not attribute creation to Aristotle. However, he sees Thomas as thinking that Aristotle's principles should lead him to a doctrine of creation. Unlike Gilson, he tried to deal with Thomas's presentation of Plato and Aristotle in the *Treatise on Separate Substances*. I show that he seriously misleads readers about Thomas's attitude towards Plato and Aristotle in that work (and in other texts as well).*

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### INTRODUCTION

Recently Mark F. Johnson has shown convincingly that Thomas Aquinas always attributed to Aristotle, and eventually to Plato as well, a doctrine of creation. A key point in his case is that Étienne Gilson misread Thomas's *Summa theologiae* 1.44.2, in such a way as to make it deny that Plato and Aristotle rose to a consideration

of being as being.<sup>1</sup> Gilson himself had pointed out that he had a forerunner in his interpretation of this text, viz Jacques Maritain.<sup>2</sup> Gilson was also the victim of a faulty printed text of Thomas's *opusculum* entitled *De articulis fidei*. Anton Pegis followed Gilson's lead in this whole matter.<sup>3</sup>

More recently still, we have had the publication of the exchange of letters between Gilson and Maritain relevant to this issue.<sup>4</sup> The letters concerned date from mid-April to early May, 1931. In fact, Gilson first proposed the interpretation of *ST* 1.44.2 to Maritain, and Maritain pointed out to Gilson that he, Maritain, had already given that very interpretation in papers published in 1920-22.<sup>5</sup> Maritain noted that he thought the *ST* text denied what *DP* 3.5 had admitted. Gilson finally convinced Maritain that *DP* 3.5 did not really attribute a doctrine of creation to Aristotle.<sup>6</sup> One sees by these

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1. See Mark F. JOHNSON, "Did St. Thomas Attribute a Doctrine of Creation to Aristotle?," *The New Scholasticism*, 63 (1989), p. 129-155. Concerning *ST* 1.44.2, see p. 143-146: GILSON'S crucial mistake is in his *L'esprit de la philosophie médiévale*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Paris, Vrin, 1944, p. 70, footnote; Engl. tr., p. 439-440, as to the reference of the pronoun: "Utrique" in *ST* 1.44.2 (he makes it refer to Plato and Aristotle, rather to the first two classifications of philosophers). — Abbreviations used in this present paper for works of Thomas Aquinas: *CM* = *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*; *DP* = *Quaestiones disputatae De potentia*; *EE* = *De ente et essentia*; *In Phys.* = *In Physicorum Aristotelis Expositio*; *SC* = *Quaestiones disputatae De spiritualibus creaturis*; *SCG* = *Summa contra gentiles*; *Sent.* = *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*; *SS* = *De substantiis separatis*; *ST* = *Summa theologiae*. While I will give references to page numbers of English translations of some works (of Thomas and Gilson), all translations in the paper are my own unless otherwise noted.
  2. Étienne GILSON, *L'esprit de la philosophie médiévale*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Paris, Vrin, 1944, p. 69, n. 1; in *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, tr. A.H.C. Downes, New York, Scribner, 1940, also p. 69. In the lengthy note, which extends to p. 71 (Engl. tr., p. 441), we read (at the end) that the true position of St. Thomas in the *ST*, i.e. 1.44.2, has been clearly noted by Jacques MARITAIN, *La philosophie bergsonienne*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Paris, M. Rivière, 1930, p. 426. Whether the error is original with Maritain I do not know. It is remarkable that Maritain and Gilson read *ST* 1.44.2 the way they did, when it is so clearly presented in Thomas PÈGUES, O.P., *Commentaire français littéral de la Somme Théologique de saint Thomas d'Aquin*, t. 3, Toulouse, Privat, 1908, p. 14-15. Pègues even warns readers (p. 14) lest the mention of Plato and Aristotle in connection with the examples of causes at the second level of causality fool them into thinking that Thomas placed them merely at this level. He also correctly presents Plato and especially Aristotle as those whom Thomas would place at the third level. On the other hand, A.-D. SERTILLANGES, O.P., writing towards the end of his career, and presumably under the influence of Gilson, interprets *ST* 1.44.2 as excluding Plato and Aristotle from among those who considered being as being: see *L'idée de création et ses retentissements en philosophie*, Paris, Aubier, 1945, p. 6, and *Le Christianisme et les philosophies*, Paris, Aubier (no date), t. I, p. 261-262. So also, the footnotes in the Piana edition of the *ST* (Ottawa, Collège Dominicain, 1941), *ad loc.* (281a13), say the text "seems" to exclude Plato and Aristotle from those who came to consider beings as beings; we are sent to GILSON'S *Espirit* and PEGIS'S *St. Thomas and the Greeks*, Milwaukee, Marquette U.P., 1939, p. 101-104.
  3. On the *De articulis fidei*, see JOHNSON, p. 138-140: Johnson mentions that Anton Pegis is fooled by the printed edition of this text, but he says nothing about Gilson in its regard. PEGIS, in his note on Thomas, Aristotle and Creation, in *St. Thomas and the Greeks*, p. 101-104, is more cautious than Gilson, and it is the passage in the *De articulis fidei* which he finds decisive. — Prof. JOHNSON has also published "Aquinas's Changing Evaluation of Plato on Creation", *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 66 (1992), p. 81-88. — See also my "St. Albert, Creation, and the Philosophers", *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 40 (1984), p. 295-307.
  4. Étienne GILSON and Jacques MARITAIN, *Correspondance 1923-1971*, Géry Prouvost, ed., Paris, Vrin, 1991 (see letters 12-17, p. 46-65).
  5. For the texts of the papers, see J. MARITAIN, *La philosophie bergsonienne*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Paris, Téqui, 1948, p. 346.
  6. MARITAIN, letter 17, p. 64-65. For Gilson, and the dubious doctrine we are going to discuss, viz mere substantiality vs. existentiality, see especially letter 14, p. 58.

letters how much the aim of making the case for an original philosophical contribution on the part of “Christian philosophy” affected the reading of the texts. Thus, the talk is about “creation” and doctrines of being: one would hardly suspect, in reading it, that what Gilson is doing is making a text say that Aristotle did not arrive at a consideration of “*ens inquantum est ens*” (“being as being”).

We see, thus, that the error is not an isolated incident, but one which is symptomatic of an entire interpretative approach. In the wake of the misreading, Gilson and Pegis undertook to explain the many passages in the works of St. Thomas where he seems to attribute a doctrine of creation to Aristotle, and even to Plato. These treatments of Thomas’s texts, by two such reputable interpreters, are still read by students and constitute a source of confusion. They affect not only the question of what Thomas thought of Plato and Aristotle, but of how to read Thomas Aquinas, and even how Thomas expresses himself about being, and what his doctrine of being really is. There is also the question of what Thomas looked for in a philosopher in order to identify a doctrine of creation as present in that philosopher’s writings.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, there is need for a review and criticism of Gilson and Pegis regarding such exegetical activities. I propose to do some of that here.

### I. ÉTIENNE GILSON

Let us examine one such exegesis, presented in a sizable footnote in Gilson’s *Le thomisme*. We should observe that this note is maintained in its integrity in the sixth edition (1964), in a part of the book which has been rather carefully revised (e.g. the note which in the fifth edition immediately preceded this one is omitted from the sixth edition; so also the main text itself has been revised to identify the third level of philosophers spoken of in *ST* 1.44.2 with Avicenna).<sup>8</sup>

7. On this question, see my paper: “St. Thomas, Aristotle, and Creation”, *Dionysius*, 15 (1991), p. 81-90.

8. Compare *Le thomisme*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., p. 155-156, with *Le thomisme*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., p. 189-190. — In his preface to the 6<sup>th</sup> edition, p. 8, Gilson says that if he were writing the book today (1964), the book would speak without scruple of “l’étant” [*ens*] and of “l’être” [*esse*]; and it would constantly be a discussion of “l’être” [being] and less often of “existence”. In this, he is not at all repudiating what he held about *esse* as existential (nor in my judgment should he), but he is appreciating Thomas’s own usage, and how fundamental the “*esse*” vocabulary is. — Also, in that preface, Gilson mentions three works in which he treated in a somewhat overall way the philosophical doctrines of St. Thomas. In addition to *Le thomisme*, which he frankly presents as “old” and in need of updating, he mentions *Elements of Christian Philosophy* [*ECP*], Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1960, and *Introduction à la philosophie chrétienne* [*IPC*], Paris, Vrin, 1960. In both of these, I might note, he goes over the issue we are discussing in this paper. In *IPC*, ch.2, entitled “The Cause of Being”, he presents the doctrine of *DP* 3.5 (wrongly identified throughout as 3.6: see p. 31, 37, 38, 43), and speaks as follows:

Let us observe attentively the limits of the services that St. Thomas looks for here from the philosophers. It suffices for his purpose that Plato and Aristotle both rose to the consideration of universal being [“l’être universel”], and that they assigned for it one sole cause. Let us say, more precisely: it is sufficient for St. Thomas that these philosophers have known enough to assign one sole cause for even one of the transcendental properties of being as being [“l’être en tant qu’être”], whether it be unity, with Plato, or the good and perfection, with Aristotle. These properties are universally attributable to being [“l’être”], and St. Thomas does these philosophers the honour of having concluded that they require necessarily one sole cause, but he attributes neither to the one nor to the other a metaphysics of creation. Plato and Aristotle explain everything about being [“l’être”], except its very existence (p. 38-39).

Thus, here we have, as earlier, the recognition that Thomas does speak of “universal being” as regards

In Gilson's main text itself, we see how important for the understanding of Thomas's metaphysical teaching the issue is. He writes :

This text [*sc.* *ST* 1.44.2] just by itself would authorize us to conclude that the doctrine of Aristotle did not provide, in the eyes of St. Thomas, a complete solution to the problem of being. If one thinks what an infinite distance separates a creator/God from a non-creator/God, one can conclude that St. Thomas has clearly seen by how much his own God differs from that of Aristotle. St. Thomas has explicitly denounced this insufficiency of Aristotelianism as one of the main errors opposed to the Christian faith.

But let us come to the footnote.<sup>9</sup> In it Gilson first notes that Thomas defines creation as the emanation of the entirety of being from the universal cause [*emanatio totius entis a causa universalis*], a definition which he gets from *ST* 1.45.1. Secondly, he notes that in *In Phys.* 8.2 Thomas affirms that Plato and Aristotle came to a knowledge of the principle of all being [*principium totius esse*]. He says Thomas goes so far as to say that, according to Aristotle, even that which primary matter has of being [*esse*], derives “from the first principle of being, which is the maximal being. Therefore it is not necessary that something be presupposed to its [*sc.* the first principle's] action, which is not produced by it [*a primo essendi principio, quod est maxime ens. Non igitur necesse est praesupponi aliquid eius actioni, quod non sit ab eo productum*]”.<sup>10</sup> Thirdly, Gilson recalls the passage from the *De articulis fidei*, as he had it in the printed edition, saying that Aristotle “held that the world was not made by God [*posuit mundum a Deo factum non esse*]” (the true reading is “was made by God”).<sup>11</sup>

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these philosophers, but we still have no admission that this touches on universal existence.

See also *ECP*, ch. 4, section 3, p. 95-103. The doctrine is the same as in the above paragraph. The great question is why Gilson never faced up to Thomas's *Treatise on Separate Substances*, which is so explicit on the issue. Anton Pegis attempted to do so, and I will discuss his attempts below.

9. See *Le thomisme*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., p. 155, n. 6; 5<sup>th</sup> ed., p. 190, n. 1; in the English translation (which is of the 5<sup>th</sup> ed.), *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, (tr. L.K. Shook, C.S.B.), New York, Random House, 1956, p. 461, n. 6.
10. In fact, lest the reader be in doubt, I note that a few words later Thomas says: “[...] therefore, even if we understand the production of things by God from eternity [*i.e.* such that the produced things exist with no temporal beginning], as Aristotle and several Platonists did, still it is not necessary, *indeed it is impossible*, that there be understood as prior to this universal production any unproduced subject.” *I.e.* it is not just “not necessary” for the highest cause to use an ontologically prior matter or subject: it is impossible. See Thomas, *In Phys.* 8.2 (ed. Maggiolo, 974 [4]).
11. See *De articulis fidei et ecclesiae sacramentis* I, 112-119 (in Leonine ed., t. 42, Rome, 1979). As this passage read in the printed edition available when Gilson wrote, it runs:

Second is the error of Plato and Anaxagoras, who held that the world was made by God, but from a pre-existent matter, against whom it is said in Ps. 148: “He commanded, and they were created”, that is to say: made from nothing. Third is the error of Aristotle, who held that the world *is not* [italics mine] made by God, but has been from eternity, against which it is said in Gen. 1: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”

This passage is impressive as presented, and it is not too much to say that it is really upon this that Gilson has taken his stand, though there is also his misunderstanding of *ST* 1.44.2. Still, it is doubtful he could have “held out”, if I may so put it, for his thesis, had it not been for the above passage. As we now know from the critical edition of the work, published in 1979 (see the editor's Introduction, p. 235), Thomas's work really reads:

Third is the error of Aristotle, who held that the world *is* [italics mine] made by God, but [...].

May we say, then, that Gilson is merely a victim of an historical accident? Quite apart from the idea that he might have looked at manuscripts on so important a point as this was for him, there is also the order

Having thus presented his own problem, Gilson first sets aside the possibility of a doctrinal evolution on Thomas's part, saying that the dates relative to one another of the *ST* and the *In Phys.* are not well established.<sup>12</sup> Still, he tells us, we can reconcile them with one another by remembering that *esse* has a strict sense and a wide sense. It is this exegesis of Gilson's that I wish to examine, since it affects many important texts of Thomas Aquinas on being.

What are the two meanings of "*esse*"? Its strict and properly Thomistic sense is "to exist". Its wide and properly Aristotelian sense is "substantial being" [*"l'être substantiel"*]. No reference is given for this by Gilson.<sup>13</sup> Let us see how he employs the distinction regarding the various texts.

Thomas, he tells us, has always attributed to Aristotle (and to Plato as well)<sup>14</sup> the merit of having ascended right up to the cause of *totius esse* (all being), understood in the sense of the total substantial being [*"l'être total substantiel"*], that is to say, [the cause] of the complete composite thing, matter and form included. (Here, Gilson refers us to *ST* 1.45.1). In this sense, he tells us, the celestial bodies are *causae essendi* [causes of being] regarding the inferior substances which they engender, each one [inferior substance] according to its species (and here Gilson refers us to *ST* 1.104.1). However, he continues, St. Thomas has never admitted that the cause by virtue of which a substance exists as a substance [*"une substance existe comme substance"*] was, by that very fact, a *causa essendi simpliciter* [a cause of being, unqualifiedly] (and here Gilson refers us to *SCG* 2.21, at the para. "*Adhuc, effectus*"). Thomas could thus say without contradicting himself, Gilson concludes, sometimes that Aristotle rose to a first cause *totius esse*, in the sense of substantial being, and sometimes

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of presentation of errors in Thomas's list, which was visible to all even in the faulty editions. As close a reader of the text as Gilson should, in my judgment, have suspected the "*non*" was a mistake.

12. Gilson says nothing about the date of the *De articulis fidei*, but in fact that would not have helped either. However, his failure to mention it probably is connected with his confidence that in *ST* 1.44.2 Thomas is excluding Aristotle from those who have arrived at a consideration of being as being, so that 1.44.2 is saying the same as the *De articulis fidei* (printed eds.). — I might say that the very idea of saying in a central text of one's work in the year 1265 that Aristotle has not arrived at a consideration of being as being [*ens in quantum est ens*] is so outlandish that it should have given Gilson pause: for that is what he is making *ST* 1.44.2 say.
13. Since presumably he is thinking of a usage fairly obvious in Aristotle in Latin translation, one thinks of the "*esse*" which signifies the quiddity of things. Thomas, at *Sent.* 1.33.1.1. *ad* 1 (ed. Mandonnet, p. 766) notes this meaning. He says:

*"Esse"* has three meanings. One is the very quiddity or nature of the thing, as when it is said that the definition is the statement signifying what the *esse* is: for the definition signifies the quiddity. Used in another way, "*esse*" is the act of the essence: as "living" [*vivere*], which is the being [*esse*] proper to living things, is the act of the soul; not second act, which is operation, but first act. Used in a third way, "*esse*" signifies the truth of the composition in propositions, according to which usage "*is*" is called "the copula": and accordingly it is in the mind putting together and distinguishing, as regards its achievement; but it has its foundation in the *esse* of the thing in reality, *i.e.* in the act of the essence [...].

It is the first of these meanings which Thomas would associate with Aristotle's usage: see Thomas, *CM* 7.3 (Cathala #1310). It is, in my judgment, rarely used by Thomas in this sense, and almost always when he is commenting upon Aristotle very closely: even then, Thomas regularly substitutes a word such as "*ratio*". See *CM* 8.2 (Cathala #1694) for the best example of this.

14. This is clearly not so concerning Plato: see Thomas, *Sent.* 2.1. *expositio textus* (ed. Mandonnet, p. 43), where Aristotle is carefully set off from Plato: Plato holds that matter does not have being from God, whereas Aristotle holds that both matter and form are produced by the first principle.

that Aristotle never rose to the idea of a God-the-creator, that is, cause of existential being.

Will this reading of Thomas's texts stand up? Or does it merely set up a troublesome fiction regarding what happens in many important texts? Does it, indeed, interfere with the understanding of Thomas's metaphysics?

First of all, when he speaks of the cause of "the total substantial being", which Thomas credits Plato and Aristotle as knowing, Gilson send us to *ST* 1.45.1. What do we find there? It is an article on the point: whether "to create" is "to make something out of nothing". It has to do with the justifying of a certain way of explaining the meaning of the word: "to create". In the *body* of the article (and Gilson explicitly refers us to the *body*: "*ad Resp.*"), "*totum ens*" throughout is clearly used regarding the product of the creator, emanating from him; the other particular causes all are viewed as presupposing something on the side of the effect, something which they do not cause. Nowhere is there a use of "*totum ens*" or "*totius esse*" which would justify Gilson's claim.

However, strange to say, there is a passage of interest to us in the reply to the second objection. The second objection is that one should grade actions as to their nobility by looking at the termini of the event, *i.e.* what the agent has to work with at the outset, and what the agent ends up with as a product. Thus, the sort of action which goes from something good to something good, and from a being to a being, is nobler than the sort which goes from nothing to something. Therefore, since creation is surely the noblest sort of action, primary among all actions, it is not from nothing to something, but from a being to a being.<sup>15</sup> — Thomas's reply is that the principle to be used in such grading is the *terminus ad quem*, *i.e.* the point of arrival, even though the point of origin may be more imperfect. To show this, he carefully points out that unqualified generation (*i.e.* generation of substance) is more noble than alteration: this is because the substantial form, at which unqualified generation arrives, is more noble than accidental form, at which alteration arrives; and yet the privation of substantial form, from which generation starts, is more imperfect than the "contrary", from which alteration starts. And he concludes (and this is what interests us) that creation is more perfect than and has priority over both generation and alteration: because the *terminus ad quem* is "*TOTA SUBSTANTIA REI*" [*sc.* the entire substance of the thing], though the point of "departure" we intellectually conjure is *no being, unqualifiedly* [*simpliciter non ens*].

Now, my point is that, in the very context to which Gilson sends us, being the cause of the complete composite, not just of the form, is precisely how Thomas presents us with what is meant by "creation". Thomas uses the very means, in order to present us with creation, that Gilson is trying to have us use to distinguish and set off a mode of causing other than creation.<sup>16</sup>

15. *ST* 1.45.1.obj. 2.

16. This use of "*tota substantia*" to focus upon the proper product of creation is not isolated: thus, at *ST* 1.45.2.*ad* 2 (ed. Ottawa 285a47-48), Thomas contrasts productions which are changes with creation, which is not a change, with the expression: "But in creation, by which the entire substance of things is produced [...] [*Sed in creatione, per quam producitur tota substantia rerum* [...]]." Gilson is, of course, attempting

There is, however, I am sorry to say, another possibility: simply that for the example of Thomas having “always credited Plato and Aristotle with having risen to the cause of all being, in the sense of substantial being”, Gilson really meant to refer us to *ST* “1.44.1 ad resp.” rather than, as he does, to “1.45.1 ad resp.” Even though the note made it through to the sixth edition, this is more than a possibility. However, to read that text (in which, after presenting his own typical argument for God as the cause of all existence, Thomas refers to both Plato and Aristotle as those who are thinking along the lines he has indicated) as though all that is being seen in the two philosophers is a doctrine of being which leaves existence out of account is nothing short of bizarre.<sup>17</sup>

The second and more important thing Gilson tells us is the exact sense of “cause of all being” which he claims is all Thomas means when this is credited to Plato and Aristotle. It corresponds to the mode of causing by which celestial bodies are credited with being “causes of being” of the generable and corruptible things they engender. Here, he refers us to *ST* 1.104.1. What do we find? This is a text in which Thomas is considering *conservational* causality, and he is contrasting a mode of causing which is merely causative of *coming into being* with a mode of causing which is causative of *being*. To be a cause of being, one must be not merely an origin of the form’s being present in the matter, but also an origin of the form as to its particular formal character. Thus, dogs, in breeding, presuppose the existence of doghood: they have it already given in themselves. But the sun, or some sort of being other than a dog, can be a cause of doghood itself, at least in some measure. Thus, we see a sense for “cause of being” which refers to the higher causes involved in the generation of generable and corruptible things.

Still, can such a mode of causing be extended to a “cause of *all being*”, which yet is not a creator (as Gilson would like to have us believe)? The answer is no. In the text of *ST* 1.104.1 itself, Thomas is careful, I suggest, to attribute to the celestial bodies merely that they are causes of “*such form*” [*causa formae secundum rationem talis formae*]; they are causes precisely of the *being* which follows upon *such form* [*per se causa esse quod consequitur ad talem formam*].<sup>18</sup> To be causes of “*all being*”, for Thomas, they would have to be causes of form in all its universality, and not

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to distinguish between causing the substance to exist as a substance, and causing the very existence of the substance. I believe that in so doing he sets up an existentially neutral substantiality which Thomas would not admit, either as what is true or as what was in the mind of Aristotle.

17. This is, of course, one of the amazing things about the reading of *ST* 1.44.2 as though it denied Plato and Aristotle the status of those philosophers who considered being as being; Thomas has just used them as support in his presentation of his own line of thinking in 1.44.1.
18. For the first-cited Latin expression, directly applied to the celestial bodies, see ed. Ottawa, 623a3-34; for the second, used earlier in the general discussion of the causal modes, see 623a7-8. In all these texts, I would maintain, Thomas’s “*esse*” is signifying existence, the act of the essence or form, not the “substantial being” Gilson has proposed. — One might think that the function of “*talis*” in 1.104.1 is merely to make the reader direct attention beyond form-getting-to-be-in-matter to “form as such” [*forma in quantum huiusmodi*] (see Ottawa ed., 623a6-7). I had myself read it that way until, considering the present problem, I saw that it works in two ways, obliging one to look for the origin of formal content as such, but also moderating the extent to which things lower than the first cause would be “cause of form”. Still, even if one shies from this reading, the point which I subsequently make about the general relation between form and existence still holds.



merely of particular forms such as doghood, etc. Thomas would have to be attributing to Aristotle, as Gilson reads the mind of Thomas, a doctrine of form such that form (as to what it is to be *form*) would not be cause of existence (as to what it is to be *existence*). Could Thomas have thought Aristotle held such a doctrine, and yet fail to mention it to his readers? For Thomas, such a doctrine would be a metaphysical monstrosity. Here is what I beg to suggest is an altogether typical text of St. Thomas. In it, the point is that it is God the Creator that must receive credit for being the origin of all forms, and so of all distinction of things one from another; the credit cannot go to some agents below the level of the creator. We read:

Since every agent acts producing something *like* itself, it is from that thing that the effect acquires its form, viz the thing to which it becomes "like" by virtue of that form; as for example, the house-in-matter [acquires its form] from the art, which is the form [*species*] of the house in the soul. But all things are rendered *like* God, who is pure act, inasmuch as they have forms, through which they are made to be actually [*fiunt in actu*]; and inasmuch as they have appetite for forms, they are said to have appetite for the *divine* likeness. Therefore, it is absurd to say that the formation of things pertains to another than the Creator of all, viz God.<sup>19</sup>

I might say that it is difficult to argue against Gilson on this matter only because what he is proposing is so far from anything Thomas would have thought of attributing to the mind of Aristotle. The above text, of course, supposes that there is a creator, and the people it is opposing are viewed as trying to attribute the forms to some *other* being. Gilson is not in that position (as regards what he wants to set up as a view of Aristotle in Thomas's mind). His idea is that Thomas puts no creator at all in the Aristotle picture, and that the first cause is a source of the being of all by merely being source of quiddity (form or *esse* in a wide sense). I cite the text to show what Thomas, obviously considering himself as working in harmony with well-known Aristotle texts,<sup>20</sup> thinks of the bond which obtains between form as such and existence. Form is that whereby a thing has existence. Accordingly, the origin of form as such must be the origin of all existence.<sup>21</sup>

19. SCG 2.43 (ed. Pera *et al.*, #1201) (last argument in the ch.). The underlining is mine.

20. See ARISTOTLE, *De anima* 2.4 (415a26-b8), on the universal striving to share in the eternal and divine, *i.e.* to exist forever; see also *Physics* 1.9 (192a17-25), on appetite for form as belonging to the nature of matter.

21. For Thomas Aquinas, existence is not something that can be found both with and without form. The two must be distinguished in creatures, but cannot be separated (see *e.g.* ST 1.50.5: ed. Ottawa, 320b49-321a10). In God, they are *identical*, not that *esse* is left alone without form, but that the two *coalesce* and become altogether the same. It is typical of Thomas that even in as early a work as *De ente et essentia* [EE], he says that essence is found *more truly* in simple, *i.e.* immaterial substances, in an ascending order culminating in God (see ch. 1, Leonine ed., lines 58-63). He is poles apart from a doctrine that God has no essence (on this idea, see EE ch. 5, line 5). On the other hand, it is a strong tendency of Gilson to speak of "what *takes the place* [tient lieu]" of essence in God, even though he affirms the need (for *us* at any rate) to say that God has an essence (see *Le thomisme*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed. p. 452; 5<sup>th</sup> ed., p. 515; Shook tr., p. 371: Fr. Shook translates "*serves as essence*"). Nevertheless, Gilson does not say that Thomas would say that God has no essence. Indeed, he explicitly corrects A.-D. Sertillanges for having so said: see *Le thomisme*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., p. 110, n. 27; 5<sup>th</sup> ed. p. 135, n. 3; Shook, tr., p. 456, n. 26.

I submit that just as the origin of existence must be the origin of form as form, so also for Thomas, the origin of form as form must be the origin of existence, taken in all its universality.

Lastly, Gilson assures us that Thomas has never admitted that the cause by which a substance exists as a substance is, *ipso facto a causa essendi simpliciter*, *i.e.* a cause of existence (“period” or “without qualification”); and in confirmation sends us to the following passage in St. Thomas :

Effects correspond proportionally to their causes : in such a way that we attribute effects actually existing to causes actually existing, and effects which have merely potential existence to causes which exist potentially ; and similarly, particular effects to particular causes, but universal effects to universal causes, as the Philosopher teaches in *Physics* 2. But being [*esse*] is the primary effect [*causatum primum*], as is evident by reason of its universality [*communitatis*]. Therefore, the proper [*i.e.* precisely corresponding] cause of being [*causa [...] propria essendi*] is the primary and universal agent, which is God. Other agents are not *causa essendi simpliciter* [cause of being, unqualifiedly], but are rather *causa essendi hoc* [cause of being this], *e.g.* a human being, or something white. Now, what is caused by creation is *esse simpliciter* [existence, in all its universality], which presupposes nothing : because there cannot be something pre-existing, standing outside that-which-is, unqualifiedly [*ens simpliciter*]. It is by other modes of production that something is made to be *this being* or *such being* : for it is from a pre-existent being that this being or such being is made. Hence, creation is action proper to God.<sup>22</sup>

It is astonishing that Gilson would use a text such as this to set off the sort of causality Thomas attributes to Plato and Aristotle from the genuinely creative causality, as though Plato and Aristotle were credited with knowing some merely particular mode of causing. In fact, the text of the *In Phys.*, of which Gilson is trying to mute the effect, makes this precise distinction between mere particular causality and the universal causality of being, in order to say that whereas Averroes is thinking only of particular causality, Plato and Aristotle knew the universal cause of *esse*.<sup>23</sup>

What this reveals is that Gilson's entire case rests upon giving identical doctrines double meanings, *i.e.* setting up a “Pickwickian” sense of “being” for Thomas to be attributing to Aristotle, a meaning different from what Thomas himself means by “being”.

Thomas never failed to call attention to positions which did less than the appropriate honour to God, as witness his criticism of Anaxagoras in *SS*.<sup>24</sup> To think Thomas would have passed by in silence the sort of position Gilson has him attributing to Aristotle is and was unthinkable.

Before concluding the present phase of our discussion, let us look back to the seminal passage in Gilson's works, as regards this whole question, *i.e.* *L'esprit de la philosophie médiévale*, in the chapter on creation, entitled “Beings and their Contin-

22. Thomas, *SCG* 2.21 (ed. Pera *et al.*, 972).

23. See Thomas, *In Phys.* 8.2 (ed. Maggiolo, #974 [4] — 975 [5]).

24. See Thomas, *De substantiis separatis* [*SS*], ch. 1, ed. Leonine, lines 54-65 (in Francis J. Lescoc (tr.), St. Thomas AQUINAS, *Treatise on Separate Substances*, West Hartford, CT, Saint Joseph College, 1959, at p. 18). Thomas's presentation of Anaxagoras, as making God the source of *distinction* only, and not the universal source of being, is remarkably close, if not identical, with what Gilson seems to be making Thomas say of Aristotle.

gency". There<sup>25</sup> he tells us that Thomas never attributed the notion of creation to Aristotle, and if Thomas has not once used this expression (*i.e.* "creation") to characterize Aristotle's doctrine of the origin of the world, the reason is that the first principle of all being, in the way Plato and Aristotle conceived it, explained completely why the universe is what it is, but not why it is. This, we must reject. Rather, the reason why Thomas never used the word "creation" for the doctrine of Plato and Aristotle (to the extent that that is true) is rather to be sought from what Thomas himself says about the word "creation". Thus, it is important that, at *ST* 1.45.3. *ad* 3, Thomas notes that the word "creation" signifies the relation of the creature to the creator, along with the note of *newness* or *beginning*. And then, in the context of the argument about the eternity of the world, we read:

[...] those who held that the world is eternal, held that the world was made by God from nothing, not that it was made *after* nothing, as with what we understand by the word "creation", but that it was not made from anything. And so it is that some of them did not refuse to use the word "creation", as is clear in the case of Avicenna in his *Metaph.*<sup>26</sup>

Thomas himself is careful about language, and that is why he does not put into the philosophers' mouths words they might not have accepted. Still, he sees Aristotle and even Plato as rising to the cause of existence, taken in all its universality.<sup>27</sup>

To conclude our Gilson criticism, I wish to suggest that his approach to this issue reveals something about his conception of Thomas's doctrine of being. If he was able to view Thomas as treating Aristotle and Plato in a certain way, it is because of what he takes Thomas's doctrine to render feasible. And what it renders feasible is a handling of those philosophers at the level of substance in general, in such a way as to leave still untouched the issue of existence. Such a possibility of treatment requires a concept of being which makes a certain kind of distinction between substance or essence and existence. What I wish to suggest is that in reality Thomas's view of the *intimacy* of the connection between essence and existence makes Gilson's proposal inappropriate. His proposal requires a substance which is too "existentially neutral",<sup>28</sup> *i.e.* remains too distanced from the creaturely act of being.

25. Étienne GILSON, *L'esprit de la philosophie médiévale*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Paris, Vrin, 1944, p. 69, n. 1; in *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, tr. A.H.C. Downes, New York, Scribner, 1940, also p. 69.

26. *ST* 1.46.2. *ad* 2.

27. One can see this in *ST* 1.45.2. *ad* 2, concerning words which would confuse creation with "change" [*mutatio*]. However, I might call attention to one sometimes neglected parallel of *ST* 1.44.2, viz *SCG* 2.37 (ed. Pera, #1130 [e]), which appears to be the earliest presentation by Thomas of a history of philosophical thought in this matter. What is remarkable in that particular presentation is that Thomas, though as usual he presents the pre-Socratics as not attaining to a doctrine of creation, nevertheless leaves room even for some of them to have done so. He says, speaking of their common doctrine that "nothing is made from nothing", that if some of them arrived at a doctrine of creation, they balked at calling it a "making" [*factio*], since that word conveys an idea of change, and the sort of origination creation is cannot be a change [*mutatio*].

Thus, we see Thomas ready to find a doctrine of creation among the philosophers, and yet ready also, not merely to see that it is not spoken of as "creation" but not spoken of as any sort of "making" and "being made".

28. For this expression, see GILSON, *Being and Some Philosophers*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Toronto, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952, p. 83, where it is applied to the doctrine of Avicenna.

Moreover, this conception of substance, on Gilson's part, goes hand in hand with a certain conception of *existence*, which I would say is not quite that of Thomas Aquinas. In treating of creation in *L'esprit*, Gilson, as we said, spoke of "Beings and their Contingency". This, I would say, is an important indicator of the difference between the doctrine of existence he attributes to St. Thomas and Thomas's own doctrine of existence. For Gilson, the distinction between essence and existence in creatures remains a doctrine of creaturely *contingency*, and the word he selects to characterize creaturely existence is "*accidit*" — it is "attached", so to speak, to the essence. He does all he can to set off Thomas so conceived from the doctrine of accidentality of creaturely existence in Avicenna.<sup>29</sup> Still, I do not believe he does enough. He has not given all its weight to Thomas's doctrine of creaturely existence as *absolutely necessary* (in the primary substances, those not subject to generation and corruption).<sup>30</sup> He is still envisaging creaturely existence through a model which sees it as the *terminus of generation*. Gilson's conception of existence still retains something of a "physical", as compared to a completely *metaphysical*, character. Generation is indeed the circumstance in which *we* first encounter existence. However, it is something which merely *happens* to existence.<sup>31</sup> Thomas, who is accustomed to view existence as found more truly in simple substance and absolutely necessary created being, has no difficulty in attributing to philosophers who view reality other than God as absolutely necessary a doctrine of creation, *i.e.* derivation of the totality of existence from a still higher (and completely freely-acting) cause. But I am aware that these last points call for much more elaboration, and in this paper I have attempted only one of the steps required to set them forth.<sup>32</sup>

## II. THE CASE OF ANTON PEGIS

Pegis clearly followed Gilson in this matter. The only reason to give him separate treatment is that he took into consideration the texts of Thomas in the *Treatise on Separate Substances*. This is the case already in his paper: "The Dilemma of Being

29. See GILSON, *L'esprit*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p. 66, n. 1, which continues on p. 67; Engl. tr., p. 435-436.

30. See *SCG* 2.30 (ed. Pera *et al.*, paras. 1063-1073); also *De potentia* 5.3. obj. 12 and *ad* 12; also *ST* 1.44.1.*ad* 2 and 1.9.2.

31. See *ST* 1.26.1.*ad* 2.

32. I might say that, in criticizing Prof. Gilson, I am by no means rejecting everything he says about Thomas on being. Indeed, I am well aware that he says many things which tend to confirm the view of Thomas I am favouring here. I think of *Le thomisme*, 6<sup>th</sup> ed., p. 451 (5<sup>th</sup> ed., p. 514; in Shook tr., p. 370): "Neither essence nor existence makes sense without one another". And I think most especially of *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, 1960, p. 196-202, on the necessity to be attributed to created being. He tells us: "There is no existential flaw in the solid ontological structure of the created universe" (p. 200) and "[...] Thomistic being is the very reverse of an existentially neutral essence" (p. 199). However, every reader of Thomas Aquinas keeps in mind the first words of *EE*: "[...] a small error in the beginning is a large one at the end [...]" and 'a being' and 'essence' are what are first conceived by the intellect [...]" — It might also be stressed that my interest has not been: how do the historical Aristotle and the historical Thomas differ, but rather how does Thomas's view of his own doctrine differ from Thomas's view of Aristotle's doctrine.

and Unity" (1942).<sup>33</sup> However, he wrote about the matter again in papers published in 1946 and 1973.<sup>34</sup>

Here, we will first present an outline of the argumentative structure of the *SS*, in order to make clear the primacy of Plato and Aristotle concerning knowledge of the cause of *existence*, and to show that even Avicenna (whom Gilson hails as an advance) is seen as a retrogression from them as regards creation.<sup>35</sup> Then, secondly, we will examine the strategy of Pegis.

### 1. *The Treatise on Separate Substances*

This work is expressly presented as about the angels. As the prologue to chapter 18 makes clear, the first 17 chapters present the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle as to the [1] origin, [2] condition of the natures, [3] distinction, and [4] order of government regarding these spiritual substances, as well as the positions of other lesser philosophers who erred by dissenting from the views of Plato and Aristotle. At ch. 18, Thomas begins the presentation of what the Christian religion asserts on each of these points about the spiritual substances or angels. One should be aware of the note of approval vis-à-vis Plato and Aristotle in this passage.<sup>36</sup>

In the Prologue to the entire work, Thomas declares his intention to bring out, as much as possible, the excellence of the holy angels. He sees as the appropriate procedure that he begins with what from antiquity human conjecture had judged about such beings, so that if we find something consonant with the teachings of the Christian Faith we can accept it, and if we find something repugnant to Catholic teaching we can refute it.<sup>37</sup>

We should keep in view the fact that this work is not about God and the existence of God. It is about beings ontologically intermediate between God and the human being. Still, it begins with the consideration of those philosophers who held that only

33. Anton C. PEGIS, "The Dilemma of Being and Unity", in R.E. BRENNAN, O.P. (editor), *Essays in Thomism*, New York, Sheed and Ward, 1942, p. 149-183, with notes at p. 379-382. See especially p. 179-183.

34. Anton C. PEGIS, "A Note on St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, 1, 44, 1-2", *Mediaeval Studies*, 8 (1946), p. 159-168; also, "St. Thomas and the Coherence of the Aristotelian Theology", *Mediaeval Studies*, 35 (1973), p. 67-117, at p. 114-116, especially n. 143.

35. It should, however, be said that Avicenna's error is not such as to exclude him from among the philosophers who have risen to a consideration of being as being, and of creation itself.

36. *SS* 18, lines 3-9: "*Quia igitur ostensum est quid de substantiis spiritualibus praecipui philosophi Plato et Aristoteles senserunt quantum ad earum originem, conditionem naturae, distinctionem et gubernationis ordinem, et in quo ab eis alii errantes dissenserunt: restat ostendere quid de singulis habeat christianae religionis assertio.*" Cf. tr. Lescoe, p. 97, ch. 17, #91 (note that the Leonine divides into two chapters, 13 and 14, what in Lescoe is one. Hence, after 13, the chapter numbers do not coincide in the Leonine ed. and in Lescoe).

37. *SS* prologue, lines 4-10: "*Intendentes igitur sanctorum angelorum excellentiam utcumque depromere, incipiendum videtur ab his quae de angelis antiquitus humana coniectura aestimavit; ut si quid invenerimus fidei consonum accipiamus, quae vero doctrinae repugnant catholicae refutemus.*" Cf. Lescoe tr., p. 16. One should note, right from the start, the use of such words as "conjecture", as regards our knowledge of the angels. Philosophically, we are very much in the domain of what in the Aristotelian tradition is called "dialectic", i.e. the domain of opinions generally held, or held by the wise. See Thomas, *Expositio libri Posteriorum* (second Leonine ed., 1989), 1.1 (Proemium), lines 99-106. See ARISTOTLE, *Topics* 1.1 (100a30-b23).

bodies exist. It is interested in any advance toward positing the existence of incorporeal realities, and so the existence of God is involved in the discussion.

Also, let us not be mesmerised by the division of the work into “chapters”. There is a structure in the doctrine which must rather be noted. We begin with people who hold that only bodies exist, and among them those who speak about “gods” or even about “God” think of these beings as bodily realities. Then we are launched into a history of “the ancient philosophers” and their three successive pathways in opposition to the most ancient position. The three ancient philosophers are Anaxagoras, Plato, and Aristotle, and the “pathway” [*via*] of each is presented in turn.

Anaxagoras saw corporeal reality as having everything mixed in together, and so he saw a need for a being which would *distinguish* bodily beings one from another, it itself being altogether unmixed and having nothing in common with the corporeal nature. Thomas sees this view as standing higher in the order of truth as compared to what came earlier. Still, it is a teaching that falls short of the truth in two important respects. First of all, it provides us with only one separate intellect which is charged with originating this universe in which we live. Thus, since we Catholics attribute to God the instituting of the universe, by the same token Anaxagoras’s opinion provides us with nothing regarding those incorporeal substances which we call “angels”, which are below God and above corporeal natures.

Secondly, Anaxagoras’s view falls short of the truth in that it does not adequately convey the power and intrinsic excellence which belong to the one intellect which is at the origin of the universe. Let us note the words of this criticism, touching as it does on God as creator :

For the intellect, which he posited as separate, he did not see as the universal principle of being [*ut universale essendi principium*], but merely as a distinguishing principle ; for he did not hold that the bodies mixed among themselves had being [*esse*] from the separate intellect, but merely that they obtained from it distinctiveness.

So ends the treatment of the first “pathway”, that of Anaxagoras.<sup>38</sup> Then, secondly we move to Plato :

Hence, Plato proceeded to eliminate the opinion of the first Naturalists by a more adequate line of thinking [*sufficiantiori via*].<sup>39</sup>

Here, we have first explained to us the fundamental reason Plato has for positing incorporeal realities, and then secondly we see the reason for a variety and a hierarchy and derivation amongst them. The reason for positing such realities at all is linked to the view of the first Naturalists that a fixed or certain truth about things could not be had by human beings, because of the continuous change in such things, and also because of the deceptiveness of the senses by which bodies are known. Accordingly, since the intellect, in knowing the truth, *apprehends* some things in separation from

38. SS 1, lines 35-65 (tr. Lescoe, p. 18).

39. SS 1, lines 66-67 (tr. Lescoe, p. 19). The Plato discussion takes up the rest of the chapter.

the matter of sensible things, Plato judged that there *are* some things which are separate from sensible things.

Thomas goes on to discuss the different sorts of abstraction which the human mind practises, and how these gave rise to a variety of types of immaterial substance in accordance with the Platonic line of thinking. Even among the more abstract intelligibles there is an order of intelligibility, and so it is noted that Plato places first and highest the idea of the one and good, which he said was the supreme God. Then Thomas explains the variety and order of the lower sorts of separate entity. We need not go into that here. It is, however, important to note that the existence of the supreme God is arrived at by the same general procedure as all the other ideas.<sup>40</sup> The presentation concludes that between us humans and the supreme God Plato posited four distinct orders of being. We can remind ourselves that the primary point of the investigation is what has been conjectured about angels.

Coming now to chapter 2, we have the presentation of the “third pathway” or “approach” or “avenue”, that of Aristotle. The chapter opens with the rejection of the Platonic approach. It does not do the job. “The root of the position is inefficacious”, says Thomas. It is not necessary for what the intellect understands separately to have being in reality separately. Accordingly, Aristotle proceeded to investigate the question of substances separated from matter, employing a more evident and more assured approach [*manifestiori et certiori via*]. He used the *motion* approach.<sup>41</sup>

Thomas outlines the thinking of Aristotle, first establishing the existence of the altogether immobile mover, *i.e.* originator of movement, along with a primary movable being (a self-mover). Aristotle further sets himself to establish the eternity of motion, and that no power in a body can be infinite. In this way, he concludes that the first originator of movement must be incorporeal, not an extended thing at all. Thomas also explains how the primary mobile thing has to be viewed as possessing intellectual appetite, giving rise to the idea that, since only bodies are subject to movement, the primary mobile thing is a body with an intellectual soul. This gives us two classes, as it were, of separate entity, the objects of appetite of the souls of the heavenly bodies, and the souls of the heavenly bodies themselves. It is explained why there are several objects of appetite of such souls, and so several separate intelligences. However, it is taken for granted in Thomas’s presentation that the supreme intelligence, the highest unmoved mover, is the supreme God. Thus, as Thomas concludes, in the Aristotelian approach, we have only two orders of intellectual substances between us humans and the supreme God, namely the separate substances which are the goals of the celestial motions and the souls of the spheres which are originators of movement by appetite and desire.<sup>42</sup>

Again, let us underline that Thomas’s interest is not in the question of the existence of God. He is studying the positions as regards any substance lying between the human being and the supreme God.

40. SS 1, lines 109-123 (tr. Lescoe, p. 20).

41. SS 2, lines 10-13 (tr. Lescoe, p. 24).

42. SS 2, lines 16-96 (tr. Lescoe, p. 24-26).

He says the position of Aristotle is more assured than that of Plato, in that “it does not stray very far from what is sensibly observable”. However, it is not as satisfying as Plato’s on two counts. One of these is that there seem to be a number of experienced phenomena (reported magical events, parapsychological activities) which would be more suitably accounted for by positing some of the sorts of beings Plato has in mind. The other, more metaphysical, is that there is something unsuitable in restricting the number of immaterial substances as dependent on the number of material substances, since what is higher among beings is not for the sake of the lower, but rather vice versa. Thomas notes Aristotle’s own reticence as to his reckoning of the number of separate substances.<sup>43</sup>

There is, however, an interesting appended comment by Thomas. It might seem, he says, that Aristotle’s general approach is unsuitable inasmuch as it is based on the eternity of motion, which is a doctrine repugnant to the Catholic faith. However, says Thomas, Aristotle’s argument does not really require the eternity of motion. It works as well granted merely the uniformity or invariability of celestial motion. An originator of motion which would not be capable of producing eternal motion will bring about motion which eventually slows down, as it gradually loses power. Thus, the constant uniformity of celestial movement (which Thomas takes as observable) allows one to conclude to a power to bring about perpetual movement. Thus, one gets the same result.<sup>44</sup>

After these basic presentations, giving the three ancient approaches, Thomas provides two chapters, the first presenting what the positions of Plato and Aristotle having in common, *i.e.* what they are in agreement on, and the second on the differences between the two positions. This method itself suggests the extent to which we are in the domain of what Aristotle called “dialectic”, *i.e.* that of opinions generally held, or of opinions of the wise. The first of these two chapters is of the greatest importance for our inquiry.

We should note carefully what issues Thomas speaks of, and the vocabulary he uses to speak of them. The reason is that, once Aristotle and Plato have been presented, Thomas will discuss the positions of certain philosophers and others who subsequently fell into error regarding the particular truths which (in Thomas’s judgment) Plato and Aristotle had really hit upon.

First of all, Plato and Aristotle are in agreement about what Thomas calls the grade or level or measure of existence [*in modo existendi*] of the immaterial substances. This is first presented as regards Plato. Thomas says :

For Plato held that all lower immaterial substances are one and good by participation in the first which is by itself one and good ; but everything which participates in something *receives* what it participates in from that from which it participates in it, and in that regard that from which it participates is its *cause* ; for example, the air has light as participated in from the sun, which is the cause of its illumination. Therefore, in this way, according

43. SS 2, lines 97-196 (tr. Lescoe, p. 26-29).

44. SS 2, lines 197-212 (tr. Lescoe, p. 29).



to Plato, the highest god is the cause of all immaterial substances, that each of them is both one and good. [Our italics.]

And we go right on to Aristotle :

And Aristotle also held this, because, as he himself says, it is necessary that that which is maximally a being and maximally true [*maxime ens et maxime verum*] is the cause of being and truth [*causa essendi et veritatis*] for all others.<sup>45</sup>

There should be no hesitation about the meaning of these passages. Thomas is clearly attributing agreement to Plato and Aristotle as to the view that the supreme God is the cause of all the other immaterial substances. In the case of Aristotle, this is expressed in terms of being, and also in terms of truth. In the case of Plato, it is in terms of unity and goodness. Still, the whole position is one concerning the “measure of existence”, and the focus is upon the cause/effect relationship.<sup>46</sup> The whole passage should be read in the light of what Thomas has already said about the shortcoming of Anaxagoras, namely that he did not see the power and excellence of the Intellect he posited, *i.e.* did not see it as the universal principle of being. Plato and Aristotle are not criticized in this way.

The second area of agreement discussed by Thomas is what he calls “the condition of the natures” [*ad conditionem naturae ipsarum*] of the substances under discussion. What Thomas means by their “condition” is to be gathered from the context. Whereas “*modus existendi*” concerned the question of origin, *i.e.* having one’s being “measured” by a relationship to an efficient cause,<sup>47</sup> “*conditio naturae*” looks within the substance itself, probes its intrinsic ontological density, if one may so put it. Both Plato and Aristotle, Thomas tells us, held that all such substances are altogether immune from matter. Nevertheless, they are not altogether immune from the composition of potency and act. For the case of Plato, Thomas points out that when something is received in a being as a participated feature, it has the role of act vis-à-vis the participating substance. Hence, in the doctrine of Plato, all the substances other than the supreme are potency/act composites. And it is necessary to say the same thing according to

45. SS 3, lines 7-21 (tr. Lescoe, p. 30).

46. James A. WEISHEIPL, O.P., in his paper: “Thomas’ Evaluation of Plato and Aristotle”, *The New Scholasticism*, 48 (1974), p. 100-124, comments on the present passage at p. 118: “[...] Plato and Aristotle agree on the manner in which separated substances exist, namely by participation [...]” I do not believe this is quite the point. “Participation”, in the passage, is used only regarding Plato. From it Thomas concludes to the causal relationship, and what he attributes to both Plato and Aristotle is the viewing of the relation between the supreme God and the other substances as one of cause to effect as regards existence itself. The distinction between “participation” and “being caused” may seem negligible, but it is one Thomas himself uses: see *ST* 1.44.1. *ad* 1. I do not mean to say, here, that Thomas was not perfectly capable of attributing a doctrine of participation to Aristotle. My aim is rather to make clear where Thomas’s focus is in speaking about being right or being wrong as to the substances’ “*modus existendi*”. This will be important later when he criticizes those philosophers who went wrong in this regard: they were wrong about the causal relationship.

47. On the relation called “measure of being and truth”, see Thomas’s *CM* 5.17 (Cathala #1003); on “*modus*” (*i.e.* “measure”), as pertaining to a thing’s being proportionate to its efficient cause, see *ST* 1.5.5 (31a39-42). As Thomas says in *CM* 5.17 (Cathala #1027), summing up the discussion of “measure of *esse*”: “Everything is measured by that on which it *depends*”: this is clearly not “measure” in the properly quantitative sense, but demands a conception of ontological hierarchy, and an appreciation of the extent to which the cause, as cause, is principle of knowledge (“measure”) of the effect.

the doctrine of Aristotle.<sup>48</sup> Aristotle holds that the intelligible aspects expressed by the terms “true” and “good” are to be attributed to what he calls “act”: hence, the primary true and the primary good must be *pure act*, and whatever fall short of this must have an admixture of potency.<sup>49</sup>

This passage is interesting in that we clearly have to do with the ontology of separate substance, not with questions pertaining to operation. Does Thomas attribute to Plato and Aristotle a doctrine of composition out of “essence and existence” (to use the terminology of the controversies in later centuries)? At this point in the text, he uses a more general vocabulary. However, what we should especially note is the way Thomas exploits the content of discussion in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* 9, chapters 9 and 10, tying it to the views of books 2 and 12: Thomas is telling us how *he* reads Aristotle.<sup>50</sup>

The third area of agreement has to do with the divine providence and the way in which the higher and lower among beings share in it. We can leave that aside for our present purposes.

Nor need we enter into the presentation of the differences between the two doctrines. Thomas concludes chapter 4 with the remark:

These are what we have gathered from diverse writings concerning the opinions of Plato and Aristotle about separate substances.<sup>51</sup>

In looking now at chapters 5 to 17, we must be particularly attentive to the rubrics provided by Thomas himself, indicating the structure of his work and the role Plato and Aristotle play in it. Thus, the first sentence of ch. 5 really gives us the whole idea:

Of those who have followed after [Plato and Aristotle] some have erred, moving away from their positions toward worse ones.<sup>52</sup>

So also, at the beginning of ch. 18 we read:

Therefore, since it has been shown what the preeminent philosophers, Plato and Aristotle, thought about spiritual substances, as regards their origin, the condition of their nature, their distinction and order of government, and in what respects others, erring, dissented from them: it remains to be shown what the Christian religion asserts on each particular point.<sup>53</sup>

48. Here we have another instance of the expression: “*secundum sententiam Aristotelis*”, which is generally of importance for our discussion.

49. SS 3, lines 22-39 (tr. Lescoe, p. 30-31).

50. See my paper, “The Number and Order of St. Thomas’s Five Ways,” *Downside Review*, 92 (1974), p. 1-18 (especially p. 11-17), for an indication of the importance for Thomas of the presentation of act and potency in Aristotle’s *Metaph.* 9.6 and 9.8-10.

51. SS 4, lines 46-48 (tr. Lescoe, p. 34): “*Haec igitur sunt quae de opinionibus Platonis et Aristotelis circa substantias separatas ex diversis scripturis colligemus.*”

52. SS 5, lines 2-4 (tr. Lescoe, p. 35): “*Eorum vero qui post secuti sunt aliqui ab eorum positionibus recedentes in deterius erraverunt.*”

53. SS 18, lines 3-9 (tr. Lescoe, p. 97). See above, n. 32, for the Latin text.

Obviously, the teachings of Plato and Aristotle constitute the high point, here, in philosophical investigation, and what we are about to see (in chapters 5-17) is a series of mistaken philosophers, straying in one way or another from the sound views of Plato and Aristotle.

Chapters 5-8 take up the case of Avicbron.<sup>54</sup> He erred concerning the *condition of the nature* of the separate substances. He thought that all substances below God are composed out of matter and form. In this, he is at odds with the opinions of both Plato and Aristotle.<sup>55</sup> We need not go into that here.

We come now to a most important chapter for our inquiry, viz ch. 9. Again, the introduction should be carefully noted:

Now, just as the foregoing position deviated from the view of Plato and Aristotle [*a sententia Platonis et Aristotilis*] concerning the *condition* of spiritual substances, taking away from them the simplicity of their immateriality, so also concerning their *mode of existing* [*modus existendi*] some are found to have deviated from the truth, taking away their origination by the primary and supreme author. In this regard, diverse men are found to have erred in three different ways. For some have held that the aforementioned substances have no cause whatsoever of their being [*causam sui esse*]; while some have held that they have a cause of their being, but that nevertheless they do not all procede immediately from the first and highest principle, but rather in a serial order the lower have the origin of their being in the higher; and others [...].<sup>56</sup>

Clearly, the error we have under consideration, particularly as regards the first-mentioned group, bears directly on creation as such. The existential nature of the question is not open to doubt. Nor is there any doubt that the people in question are being criticized as straying from the position of Plato and Aristotle, the true position.<sup>57</sup> And here is how they are described:

Thus, the first group held that spiritual substances are altogether uncreated [...].<sup>58</sup>

Who are these people? No names are mentioned. The Leonine editors suggest some Averroists are meant.<sup>59</sup> In any case, the position is diagnosed by Thomas as

54. I.e. Solomon ibn GABIROL (fl. 1020-1058 A.D.), author of the work known to Thomas as *Fons vitae*. See James WEISHEIPL, "Albertus Magnus and Universal Hylomorphism: Avicbron", in Francis J. KOVACH, ed., and Robert W. SHAHAN, *Albert the Great: Commemorative Essays*, Norman, Okla., University of Oklahoma Press, 1980, esp. p. 245-246.

55. SS 5, lines 4-9 (Lescoe tr. p. 33) It would be interesting to collect all the references to "Plato and Aristotle" in the chapters criticizing Avicbron. Notice ch. 6, line 28 (Lescoe tr. p. 40) and ch. 7, lines 60-61 (Lescoe tr. p. 47), where both Plato and Aristotle are credited with a doctrine of matter as pure potency; the last-mentioned text has the expression: "*secundum sententiam Aristotilis et Platonis*".

56. SS 9, lines 3-16 (tr. Lescoe, p.57).

57. While the errors concerning the mode of existing are said to be deviations "from the truth", I have no doubt that the sentence makes an intentional parallel between "the view of Plato and Aristotle" and "the truth".

58. SS 9, lines 23-24 (tr. Lescoe, p. 58): "*Primi quidem igitur spirituales substantias omnino increatas esse existimant [...]*" (my underlining).

59. See SS 9, the note on line 10. The editors give as reference, from among the propositions condemned at Paris in 1277 (Denifle-Chatelain, *Chartularium Univ. Paris* I, 545-547), props. 28, 45, 70, and 71. These references are somewhat weak, though not valueless. However, I suggest prop. 46: "*Quod, sicut ex materia non potest aliquid fieri sine agente, sic nec ex agente potest aliquid fieri sine materia; et, quod Deus non*

stemming from an inability to transcend the imagination, and to envisage a mode of causing other than that which befits material things. At this point Thomas embarks on his presentation of the history of human investigation of the origin of things. This, as far as I know, is the most elaborate such presentation, moving through four, rather than merely three, phases. At the fourth phase, we come to the mode of causing which the offending philosophers have failed to reach, a mode of causing which transcends that which could apply only to material substances, a mode of causing which allows one to view even spiritual substances as caused to exist. There can be no doubt that creation is meant. And we begin as follows :

But beyond this mode of being made [*sc.* the alternation of diverse forms in matter], it is necessary to assert another loftier one, according to the view of Plato and Aristotle [*secundum sententiam Platonis et Aristotilis*].<sup>60</sup>

Again, there can hardly be any doubt that it is the new, loftier mode of being made, *i.e.* creation, which is being seen as the doctrine of Plato and Aristotle. In order to make his point, Thomas confronts us with no less than four distinct arguments each ending in the affirmation of the mode of being made he wishes to present to the mind of the reader. Let us review briefly simply the four conclusions.

The first ends :

[...] therefore it is necessary, beyond the mode of being made by which something is made, the form coming to the matter, that there be understood as prior [*praeintelligere*] another origin of things, according as being [*esse*] is attributed to the entire universe of things by the first being [*ens*] which is its own being [*esse*].

And the second ends :

[...] there must be a mode of being made or origin of things, not involving any change or movement, by influence of being [*per influentiam essendi*].

And the third :

Therefore, it is necessary to see in things an origin whereby being itself, taken universally [*ipsum esse communiter sumptum*], is precisely what is dealt out to things [*per se attribuitur rebus*], [a mode of origin] which transcends all change and movement.

Lastly :

[...] therefore it is necessary that the primary being be the cause of being of all things.<sup>61</sup>

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*est causa efficiens, nisi respectu ejus quod habet esse in potentia materie.*" (p. 546) This suggests the background is the remarks of Averroes in his commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*, where he criticizes the Islamic teachers for their doctrine of generation where there is no matter involved. See AVERROES, *In Phys.* 8.4 (ed. Venice, 1562, t. IV, fol. 341rC-F). — Association of the position with Averroists would tie in well with the general similarity of what is done here in *SS* 9 with what happens in Thomas's *In Phys.* 8.2 (973-975), as well as in *ST* 1.44.1-2 and 45.1-2. — Fr. Lescoe, at p. 57, ch. 9, #46, n. 3, suggests props. 46 and 47.

60. *SS* 9, lines 102-104 (tr. Lescoe, p. 60).

61. *SS* 9, lines 114-118, 127-131, 140-144, and 155-156, for the four conclusions (tr. Lescoe, p. 60-61).

Without attempting to say that Thomas gets or even thinks he is getting all the arguments from texts of Aristotle, let alone Plato, there can be no doubt as to the mode of causality he is attributing to them as teachers.

We will come back to this chapter in a moment, but first we should look at the following one, ch. 10, if only briefly. There is clearly a gradation of errors regarding the “mode of existing” of separate substances other than God. We began with the worst, which was simply to see them as not having a cause of their existence. We now move to a second error, whereby all things find the origin of their existence in the first principle, but not all are immediately from that principle; rather, the highest produces one thing, which in turn produces what is below it, etc. Here, Thomas explicitly names one of the culprits, viz Avicenna. “This is the position of Avicenna [...]”, he says.<sup>62</sup> The interesting point in this chapter is that, after arguing that God must be the creator of all, Thomas suggests that, still, someone might think he has set things up in such a way that some flow from others by creative causality. Accordingly, rejecting *this* view as impossible, Thomas offers arguments as to why *only* God can be a creator. In order to do so, he begins by pointing to the already discussed (in the previous chapters) twofold mode of production of things, one by way of motion and change, the other without any motion or change. In the former sort of production, one can have intermediate causes leading back to the first principle. However, in the case of production without motion or change, only God can be the producer. The point which interests us here is that Thomas in this passage explicitly calls this mode of production “creation”. He says:

Therefore, some things can be brought into being [*produci in esse*] through change or motion by the first principle, employing second causes as intermediates; but in the mode of production which is without motion — which is called “creation” [*qui creatio nominatur*] — the relation to a cause is to God alone. But this is the only way immaterial substances can be brought into existence [...].<sup>63</sup>

This confirms, if there was need of confirmation, that the sort of origin Thomas saw Plato and Aristotle providing for all things other than the highest cause, *i.e.* the loftier sort of origin, the one without change or motion, is what Thomas calls “creation”. In the general plan of *SS*, Avicenna appears as straying from the truth about creation, at least in one respect.

Let us note, at this point, how different is what we have seen from the scenario Gilson had in mind.

62. *SS* 10, lines 25-26 (tr. Lescoe, p. 65). Thomas says also that the position seems to be supposed by the *Liber de causis*, but the Leonine editors of *SS*, on this passage, note that Thomas, in his own *Commentary* on the *Liber*, seems to have a different view of its meaning.

63. *SS* 10, lines 89-95 (tr. Lescoe p. 67). The term “creation [*creare*]” is again explicitly and very deliberately introduced at line 125 (Lescoe, p. 68). A possible reason for the introduction of the “creation” terminology here is that Thomas wishes to bring his point home to Christian theologians, because of the position taken by Peter Lombard in his *Sentences*. Peter had held that while God does not use intermediary creative causes, he *could have* done so. Thomas argued for both sides of this issue in *Sent.* 4.5.1.3.3 (ed. Moos, p. 209-211), but subsequently, as *ST* 1.45.5 and here in *SS*, he unqualifiedly rejects the possibility of such a position.

## 2. *The Pegis strategy*

Here we leave aside the study of the structure of the *SS* in order to see what Anton Pegis does to argue against its presenting Plato and Aristotle as advocates of creation. And first, we return to chapter 9, on those who held that the spiritual substances other than God have no cause of their existence. We should note that one of the arguments of Thomas's opponents which is therein presented and answered is that what eternally exists has no cause. Answering this, Thomas as often before refers to two texts of Aristotle where it is said that there are some necessary things which have a cause of their necessity.<sup>64</sup> It is then that he makes the important statement :

Therefore, it is not to be thought that Plato and Aristotle, just because they held that immaterial substances or even celestial bodies have always been, took away from them a cause of being [*causa essendi*]; for it is not in this respect that they deviated from the teaching of the Catholic faith [*a sententia catholicae fidei*], viz that they held such things to be uncreated, but rather [they deviated in this respect], that they posited them always to have been : the contrary of which the Catholic faith holds.<sup>65</sup>

To say, as Anton Pegis does, that such a text does not say Plato and Aristotle held that things are created, but only that they did not say they were uncreated, is obviously to go directly against the evident intention of Thomas in the entire chapter.

Pegis says :

Between the *Prima Pars* and the commentary on the *De Caelo*, both of which deny the idea of creation to Aristotle, we must locate *De Sub. Sep.* [our just cited passage], which seems to affirm it. Yet the text does not affirm it : it does not say that Plato and Aristotle had a doctrine of creation ; it says that, even though they believed in an eternal world, this did not lead them to deny creation. The question is : did they affirm it ? The point of *De Sub. Sep.* [our passage] is, not that Plato and Aristotle held any doctrine of creation, but that they could offer the principles from which such a doctrine could be reached — and was reached by St. Thomas in the course of the same text.<sup>66</sup> As to what St. Thomas thought on more historical grounds, a sentence on Plato speaks for itself : "*Haec autem positio quantum ad aliquid quidem veritatem haberi potest, simpliciter autem veritatem habere non potest* [this position can be true in a certain respect, but it cannot be unqualifiedly true]."<sup>67</sup>

64. We should note, however, that the problem dealt with here in the *SS* 9, lines 180-234 (Lescoe tr., p. 63), is that what is brought into being by change must have being *after* not being, whereas in the mode of production which is by simple emanation or influence the effect or result can be understood as always having being. Thomas sees the sort of thing he has in mind best exemplified for us humans, not in corporeal causes and effects, but rather in "intellectual things which are at a greater remove from motion". Thus, he points out that the truth of the principles is the cause of the truth which is in the conclusions, which conclusions are always true. It is at this point that he introduces Aristotle on necessary things which have a cause of their necessity : the texts are Aristotle, *Metaph.* 5.6 (1015b9) and *Phys.* 8.3 (252a32-b6). — For the same issue dealt with more directly in terms of necessity, see *ST* 1.44.1.ad 2.

65. *SS* 9, lines 215-222 (tr. Lescoe, p. 63).

66. This is the approach used already by Jacques Maritain, in the appendix (dating from 1920 or 1922) to *La philosophie bergsonienne* (3rd ed., p. 346), for handling Thomas's assertions in *In Phys.* 8.2.

67. PEGIS, "St. Thomas and the Coherence...", p. 115, n. 143. This note also refers us to his paper (which I have not seen), "St. Thomas and the Origin of the Idea of Creation", in *Philosophy and the Modern Mind*, F.X. Canfield, ed., Detroit, Sacred Heart Seminary, 1961, p. 49-65.

Surely we have seen enough of the plan, and execution of the plan, of the *Treatise on Separate Substances* to see that Pegis is quite wrong to view Thomas as not affirming the presence, in the minds of both Plato and Aristotle, of an appreciation of the higher mode of origination.

The further remark of Pegis, “[...] as to what St. Thomas thought on more historical grounds [...]” is unsatisfactory as well as somewhat puzzling. As for the text he cites, it is found in a chapter (ch. 11) which presents one of the groups of philosophers who have deviated from the views of Plato and Aristotle and from the truth. They are explicitly called “Platonists”. The text is not, then, *pace* Pegis, “a sentence on Plato”. Secondly, whoever these people are, they do not deny, rather they affirm creation. Here is St. Thomas’s presentation of them :

Moved by these arguments [*sc.* the arguments Thomas himself has just presented why God alone must be the immediate origin of being of all immaterial substances] the Platonists held that God is immediately the cause of being, [meant] in the aforescribed mode of producing, which is without change or motion, of all immaterial substances and, universally, of all existents ; but they held that according to other participations of divine goodness there is an order of causality in the aforementioned substances.<sup>68</sup>

It is about this position that St. Thomas says, as Pegis cites, that the position can be conceded a measure of truth, but that it is not unqualifiedly true.<sup>69</sup> — We should note, first, that if it were about Plato, as Pegis is suggesting, it would be a most explicit affirmation that Plato held a doctrine of creation. In fact, it is not about Plato. Secondly, whoever it is about, it is not about whether or not the group holds a doctrine of creation : it rather is most explicit in affirming that they do hold such a doctrine, and even that they hold it because they agree with the reasons Thomas gave for rejecting the position of Avicenna, *i.e.* the position that God is creator only of the highest of the separate substances under God.

As for Pegis’s claim that before the *SS*, in *ST* 1.44.2, Thomas denies there is a doctrine of creation in Aristotle, this is simply not so. This has been satisfactorily shown by Mark Johnson.<sup>70</sup> But Pegis also maintains that the *Commentary of St. Thomas on Aristotle’s De caelo* denies Aristotle a doctrine of creation. Again, this is simply not so. In the two texts referred to by Pegis, all Thomas says is that Aristotle is arguing against a doctrine of an incorruptible universe which yet has come into being by *natural generation*, and that Aristotle is not saying anything about the sort of emanation from the first principle which the Catholic faith professes. Thus, the texts of Thomas explicitly say Aristotle is not referring to creation at all in the particular context, and from this Pegis takes Thomas to be saying that Aristotle does not have a doctrine of creation.<sup>71</sup>

68. *SS* 11, lines 4-11 (tr. Lescoe, p. 71).

69. *SS* 11, lines 34-36 (tr. Lescoe, p. 71).

70. JOHNSON, “Did St. Thomas attribute...”, p. 143-146.

71. The two passages of St. Thomas to which Pegis refers (in “St. Thomas and the Coherence...”, p. 114 and 115, and nn. 142 and 143) are *In De caelo* 1.6 (Spiazzi #64) and 1.29 (#287). — In order to convey to the reader something of the inadequacy of Pegis’s casual approach to these texts I will further note that in the first context, *i.e.* 1.6, Thomas has already discussed objections to what Aristotle is saying, objections

In his earlier paper, "A Note on St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, 1, 44, 1-2", Pegis, after misinterpreting *ST* 1.44.2,<sup>72</sup> comes to the case of *SS*, and quotes the passage: "But beyond this mode of being made, it is necessary to assert another loftier one, according to the doctrine of Plato and Aristotle" (my translation), together with the first argument (of the four which Thomas provides). Pegis says:

Surely St. Thomas is not saying that Plato and Aristotle are the authors of all these celebrated Thomistic doctrines. There is plenty of evidence in the *De Substantiis Separatis* itself to show how critical St. Thomas could be of both Plato and Aristotle.<sup>73</sup> Thus, in the first chapter of this work, we have an elaborate presentation of Platonism, which is followed by the following critical reflection at the beginning of the second chapter: "*Hujus autem positionis radix invenitur efficaciam non habere*," and the *radix* of this Platonic position, which St. Thomas immediately eliminates, is the well-known abstractionism according to which the intellect attributes separate existence to whatever it thinks separately [...]. As for Aristotle, it is true that he shone brightly in defeating the abstractionism of Plato and the Platonists. Nevertheless, having admitted this, St. Thomas will have none of Aristotelian physicism. He does not hesitate to write that the Aristotelian conception of the world of separate substances *minus sufficiens videtur quam Platonis positio*.<sup>74</sup>

Pegis does not mention to his reader that these last few cited words, while they do say that Aristotle's position is "less sufficient" than Plato's, also (in the same

coming from the Christian writer John Philoponus. Philoponus has invoked against Aristotle the authority of Plato: Aristotle is saying that the celestial bodies are ingenerable and incorruptible, whereas Plato held that the heavens and the entire universe is generated. Thomas rejects this argument of Philoponus. He says:

Plato held the heavens to be generated, but by this he did not mean that the heavens are subject to generation, which is what Aristotle here intends to deny; but rather that it is necessary that it have being from some higher cause, as having multiplicity and extension in its parts: by which is meant that its being [*esse eius*] is caused by the primary One [*a primo uno*], by which all multitude must be caused. (1.6, #61)

Thus, here in the very context used by Pegis, we have Thomas once more attributing to Plato what Thomas has referred to in *SS* as the loftier mode of origin, *i.e.* creation. And Aristotle is obviously viewed as just not talking about that in these particular texts.

Again, in the second context referred to by Pegis, *i.e.* 1.29, where Aristotle is saying that something cannot be generated and incorruptible, Thomas says this seems to be said against Plato. However, he notes:

[...] though some say that Plato did not mean that the world is corruptible, as with those things which have within themselves a cause of corruption, but by this [its "corruptibility"] he meant the *dependence of its being on another* [*dependentiam sui esse ab alio*], because, that is, the necessity of being [*necessitas essendi*] does not belong to it by virtue of itself alone, but by virtue of God. But whatever Plato's meaning was, it does not matter here, because Aristotle is objecting to the words he used [*contra verba eius*]. (1.29, #283; italics mine).

Thomas quite clearly sees here the possibility of Plato holding a doctrine of creation. However, his point is that Aristotle in these passages is simply talking about the lower sort of origin. In short, the two passages cited by Pegis are irrelevant at best, and against Pegis when read in context.

Pegis would have done better to pay attention to such a text as Thomas, *In De caelo* 1.8 (Spiazzi #91), wherein Thomas explicitly sees Aristotle positing God as maker of the celestial bodies, and not merely as *final* cause, as some people were then saying. For this reference, I am indebted to JOHNSON, "Did St. Thomas Attribute...", p. 153, n. 54.

72. See JOHNSON, "Did St. Thomas Attribute...", p. 143-146, as well as 138 and n. 19.

73. Yes, exactly. Which raises the question: since St. Thomas criticizes Anaxagoras, at *SS* ch. 1, lines 56-65 (tr. Lescoe, p. 18) for having insufficiently expressed the power and nobility of God, precisely as having failed to judge God to be "the universal principle of being", how is it that there is no such criticism of Plato or Aristotle?

74. PEGIS, "A Note...", p. 167.



sentence) say that Aristotle's position is "more certain", or "more solidly based" [*certior quidem videtur*].<sup>75</sup> — But before further comment on the above, we should add the very next thing Pegis says:

In brief, the same St. Thomas who can develop such remarkable conclusions *secundum sententiam Platonis et Aristotelis* can write as follows in a work of the same period: "But these approaches are not very suitable for us; because we neither hold with the mixture of sensible things, as in Anaxagoras, nor with the separateness of the universals, as in Plato, nor with the perpetuity of motion, as in Aristotle. Thus, we must proceed along other lines to show the proposed conclusion."

Now, this last citation of Thomas by Pegis is taken from the *Disputed Question on Spiritual Creatures*, a. 5. What is to be noted by us is what question is therein being raised. It is about whether there are any spiritual creatures which are not united to bodies. *I.e.* other than the human intellectual soul (a spiritual creature united to a body), are there any other *creatures*, beings other than God, which are spiritual and are *not united to bodies*? Thus, it is the very issue raised in the *Treatise on the Separate Substances*. That Anaxagoras is rejected is hardly surprising, though in *SC* Thomas does not even point out that he really does not hit on the sort of thing we are after at all. Plato's position is rejected for the same reason as in *SS*. What is interesting is that Aristotle is rejected for a reason which is held explicitly by the *SS* to be somewhat irrelevant. In the *SS*, the uniform constancy of celestial motion (taught by Aristotle, and which Thomas takes to be a fact) is judged to maintain the argument just as well as the eternity of motion.<sup>76</sup> One can hardly conclude, with Pegis, that in *SS* "St. Thomas will have none of Aristotelian physicism".

However, what is really disturbing about what Pegis does in the above passage is that, having quoted St. Thomas on the rejection of the Platonic "root", he quotes the passage about Aristotle's position being "less sufficient" than Plato's. This leaves the reader with quite the wrong impression of what is happening. The point to remember is that the text is *not about the existence of God*. Thus, the remark about Aristotle's insufficiency has to do with how well he supplies us with *created* spiritual substances. Plato's line of thinking, while weak, provides a considerable variety of such beings. Aristotle's procedure, while safer, does not provide that variety which Thomas thinks we need, given the phenomena which he thinks must be tracable to such beings.

Thomas himself, as he shows in the *SC* and elsewhere, has his own approaches for proposing the existence and number of the separate substances.<sup>77</sup> However, in the *SS*, he does not reject what Aristotle has done, though he works to dispel any misunderstandings about its limitations. What is important for us is that the criticisms of Plato and Aristotle here do not touch Thomas's view that they both have a conception of the highest being as universal cause of being. Pegis tries to use these materials to put in doubt Thomas's view on this latter point.

75. *SS* 2, lines 97-100 (tr. Lescoe, p. 26).

76. See *SS* 2, lines 197-212 (tr. Lescoe, p. 29). This passage (remarked on above, at p. 17, ca n. 40) shows quite a different attitude towards what Aristotle is doing than we see in the *SC*.

77. See *SCG* 2.91 and especially 2.92; and *ST* 1.50.1, 3, and 4.

Before we leave *SS*, we might call attention to one more discussion, which will help to indicate what is genuinely the outlook on Aristotle in the work. In chapters 13 and 14 we have a presentation of a position of some thinkers who hold that neither the created separate substances nor God himself have a knowledge of things such as to account for a doctrine of providence. Some deny them a knowledge of material singulars. But advancing into even greater folly [*in maiorem insaniam procedentes*],<sup>78</sup> they say that God knows nothing but himself alone. Chapter 14 refutes this doctrine as regards the issue of divine knowledge.<sup>79</sup> In it, after presenting arguments, Thomas devotes a lengthy discussion to analysing Aristotle's argument in *Metaph.* 12.9 (1074b15-1075a10). He says that since the offending thinkers have found the occasion for their error in Aristotle's demonstration there, it is necessary to show that they have not really followed what Aristotle himself had in mind.<sup>80</sup> And having made this careful study he concludes :

Therefore it is clear to someone who diligently considers the words of the Philosopher [*sc.* Aristotle], that he does not mean to exclude from God absolutely the knowledge of other things, but [to say] that [God] does not understand things other than himself by participating in them, so as to be rendered actually understanding by virtue of them, as occurs in any intellect whose substance is not its own act of understanding. Rather, [God] understands all things other than himself, inasmuch as his being is the universal and fontal principle of all being [*eius esse est universale et fontale principium omnis esse*], and his act of understanding is, so to say, the universal root of understanding which comprehends all intelligence.<sup>81</sup>

There is every reason to say that in the mind of Thomas, as we see it in *SS*, Aristotle is a philosopher who has risen to a consideration of the loftier sort of origin Thomas calls "creation" : in this respect, as Thomas sees it, Aristotle, unlike Anaxagoras, has not misjudged the power and nobility of the highest cause.

## CONCLUSION

Of the two cases we have examined, that of Gilson is the more serious, since it involved attributing to Thomas a doctrine of being somewhat other than the true one. Pegis at least maintained that (at any rate, for Thomas) Aristotle's *principles* should lead one to affirm the doctrines Thomas is holding for the real truth and is attributing (to some extent) to Aristotle. In reviewing at some length the procedure followed by Thomas in *SS*, I hope to have shown how far both historians were from the real outlook of Thomas in this matter.

78. *SS* 13, line 26 (tr. Lescoe, p. 78).

79. The introductory remarks for ch. 14, *i.e.* *SS* 14, lines 3-8 (tr. Lescoe, p. 80) are of interest. Thomas says :  
And because the just-presented views are repugnant to the common opinion, not merely of the majority of human beings but even of the wise, it ought to be shown by solid arguments that they are not true, and that the just-presented arguments do not conclude what they are meant to conclude.

80. *SS* 14, lines 87-90 (tr. Lescoe, p. 82).

81. *SS* 14, lines 180-209 (tr. Lescoe, p. 85-86).