Aquinas, Platonism and the Knowledge of God

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by

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Preface

Some of the material in this work has been presented at conferences and published in the form of articles. Part of the content of Chapters I, 2 and 3 appeared in a paper entitled "Some Remarks on Aquinas' Theological Inheritance from the Islamic and Jewish Traditions" at the 23rd Annual Meeting of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations at University College Dublin, July 7th-10th 1994. Part of Chapter 2 appeared in an article, "The Relationship between Transcendence and Death in the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas", Milltown Studies, Spring 1990, No.25, pp.63-75. Material from this chapter was also presented as a paper entitled "Death and the Soul in Aquinas' Philosophy of Religion" at the Irish Philosophical Spring 1991 Conference in Kilkenny, Ireland.

Part of Chapter 3 was published as an article, "The Interfacing Image of the Soul in the Writings of Aquinas", Milltown Studies, Autumn 1993, No.32, pp.70-75. Material from this chapter was also presented as a conference paper entitled "Being on the Boundary : Aquinas' Metaphor for Subject and Psyche" at the International Conference on The Linguistic Representations of the Subject at The University of Liverpool, July 4th-5th, 1994.

Part of Chapter 4 was presented as a conference paper, "The Mind - body Problem in Out of Body States : A Thomistic Perspective", at the Irish Philosophical Spring 1993 Conference in Limerick, Ireland. Some of the content of this chapter was also published in an article entitled "Aquinas' Concept of the Body and Out of Body States" in The Heythrop Journal, October 1993, Vol.34, No.4, pp.387-400.

Abbreviations

De An.	Quaest. Disp. De Anima
(e.g. De An.I	Quaestio I)
De Ver.	Quaest. Disp. De Veritate
(e.g. De Ver.11.1	Quaestio 11 Art.1)
S.C.G.	Summa Contra Gentiles
(e.g. S.C.G.II.81	Book II, Chapter 81)
Sent.	Scriptum Super Libros Sententiarum
(e.g. II.Sent.d.1.q.2.a.3	Book II, distinctio 1, quaestio 2, art.3)
S.T.	Summa Theologica
(e.g. S.T.I.89.1	Part I, Quaestio 89 Art.1)
Super De Trin.	Expositio Super Librum Boethii De Trinitate
(e.g. Super De Trin.2.1	Quaestio 2 Art.1
De Op. Mundi	De Opificio Mundi
Leg. All.	Legum Allegoriae
Poster. C.	De Posteritate Caini
Deus Imm.	Quod Deus immutabilis sit
Mut Nom.	De Mutatione Nominum
Enn.	Ennead
(e.g. Enn.IV.8.1	Ennead IV, Chapter 8, Section 1)
G.P.	Guide of the Perplexed
(e.g. G.P.I.60	Book I, Chapter 60)

Introduction

The traditional view of St. Thomas Aquinas holds that his thinking was largely influenced by that of Aristotle. This is reflected, for example, in the following statement of Bertrand Russell who, even though he criticised Aquinas for not displaying a sufficiently objective philosophical attitude (1), acknowledged the Aristotelian roots of Thomism :

> In its general outlines, the philosophy of Aquinas agrees with that of Aristotle, and will be accepted or rejected by a reader in the measure in which he accepts or rejects the philosophy of the Stagyrite. The originality of Aquinas is shown in his adaptation of Aristotle to Christian dogma, with a minimum of alteration. (2)

This view is consistent with the opinions of the most devoted of Thomistic commentators and is also suggested by Aquinas himself (3). St. Thomas often situates his preference in the context of opposing Platonism (4), of which he is frequently critical, disagreeing with many of

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(1) Bertrand Russell, History of Western Philosophy (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1961), pp.453-454.

(2) Ibid., p.452.

(3) e.g. De Ver.11.1.

(4) S.T.I.89.1.

its doctrines and perceives the views of Aristotle as being more attuned to human experience (5). There are a number of issues on which Aquinas claims to disagree with Plato and his followers. These include the pre - existence of the human soul and the relationship between soul and body which Aquinas thinks that Platonism regards as an accidental rather than a substantial relationship (6). Aquinas holds, on the contrary, that soul and body come into existence together and he defends the substantial integrity of the soul - body relationship as being definitive of human existence (7). Thomas also rejects the Platonic notion of a universal soul and Plato's theory of subsistent ideas. In his approach to these and other issues, Aquinas saw himself as an Aristotlian and opposed to Plato. It will be interesting, however, to observe the difficulties which he experienced with the Aristotelian view of the relationship between soul and body and between the intellect and the senses when he comes to explain how the human mind can see God.

Aquinas, nevertheless, did not totally reject Plato in every respect. When writing about divine goodness in S.T.I.6.4, for example, he agrees with what he takes to be

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(5) S.T.I.88.1.

(6) S.C.G.II.57.

(7) S.C.G.II.83.

Plato's views on subsistent goodness (8). In general, though, he did not see himself as favouring Platonism but rather as trying to develop Aristotelian thought in order to place it at the service of Christian theology.

Of course it might be argued that the views of Aristotle and Plato can no longer be as strictly differentiated from each other as was once believed possible since a case might be made to suggest that Aristotle himself was a Platonist in certain aspects of his thought (9). In Aquinas' mind, however, there is a clear distinction between both approaches and he chooses Aristotle's views as being preferable to those of Plato for providing a better philosophical foundation for his own theological enterprise. Aquinas undoubtedly considered himself to be a Christian Aristotelian rather than a Christian Platonist and it is in terms of this preference that his understanding of how the human mind can best know God will be considered here. One would expect that Aquinas would have followed an exclusively Aristotelian line of thought in his theory of knowledge but this is not wholly true. Certainly his epistemology contains

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(8) This will be discussed more fully in Ch.I, Section I.3.

(9) Cf. in this connection Richard Sorabji, "The Ancient Commentators on Aristotle" in Richard Sorabji (ed.), Aristotle Transformed (London : Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1990), pp.1-30, (here, p.15).

an Aristotelian interpretation of how God can be known through sensory experience but this exists side by side with what amounts to a Platonic explanation of how God's essence can be known in a more sublime way independently of the senses.

It is also true, of course, that Aquinas' early writings display a definite interest in Platonically - inspired texts such as those of Pseudo - Dionysius who influenced him in certain respects (10). Examples of this can be found in Aquinas' cosmology and in his concept of an angelic hierarchy. There is also St. Thomas' interest in Liber de Causis, the spurious Aristotelian text which he knew to contain a summary of Proclus' thought. However, for the most part, Aquinas regards himself as a follower of Aristotle and it is against this background that the present study traces the importance of Platonism in the Thomistic view of how the human mind can know God. In his study of Aquinas' Platonic heritage, Arthur Little astutely observes that "the reluctance of Thomists to acknowledge the Platonic affiliation of Thomism is founded on St. Thomas' own

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(10) A.-M. Landry O.P. & D.Hughes O.P. (trans.), M.-D. Chenu, Towards Understanding Saint Thomas (Chicago : Henry Regnery Company, 1964), p.230.

reluctance to acknowledge it." (11). This Platonic affiliation of Aquinas is of considerable significance when he comes to examine the human mind's disposition for theological knowledge. It will be suggested in the course of this study that without such an influence, Aquinas would have found it difficult to explain from a philosophical point of view how the mind can see God's essence, given the limitations of his Aristotelian - based epistemology. These restrictions become very obvious indeed in S.T.I.89.1 where St. Thomas seems unable to account for the soul's knowledge after death by using an Aristotelian interpretation. It is the Platonism in Aquinas which enables him to justify his position on non - sensory based knowledge as is clear from his descriptions of the kind of mechanisms involved in the mind's vision of God (12). It is this same belief in the human mind's disposition for knowledge obtained independently of the senses that poses great difficulty for his Aristotelianism and also for his theory of human bodiliness.

It is, of course, quite startling to find the extensive use which Aquinas makes of Platonism in his writings on the subject of how we can best come to know God, given his

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(11) Arthur Little S.J., The Platonic Heritage of Thomism (Dublin : Golden Eagle Books Ltd., 1949), p.xv.

(12) Cf. Chapters 4 and 5 in this work.

self - declared preference for Aristotle and his public opposition to Platonism. However, the evidence suggests that he undoubtedly borrowed from the latter tradition which includes, not only Plato's thinking but also that of the Neoplatonists, for example, Proclus. Aquinas' use of Platonism inevitably clashes at certain points with his Aristotelianism and this results in the kind of uneasy juxtaposition of both approaches in his epistemology which also raises a question about the coherence of his account. This Thomistic Platonism compels a new evaluation of certain aspects of his thinking which, in itself, is an exciting development that has merited some attention in recent years. Arthur Little, to whom reference was made earlier, was one of a growing number of writers who have emphasised the importance of this aspect of Aquinas' thought (13). One of the first to observe this trend in St. Thomas was Inge who said that Aquinas was much closer to Plotinus than to "the

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(13) Cf. e.g. Cornelio Fabro, La Nozione Metafisica di Participazione (Societa Editrice Internazionale di Torino, 1963) ; Ralph McInerney, St. Thomas Aquinas (Notre Dame : University of Notre Dame, 1982), pp.105-126 ; Richard and Clara Winston (trans.), Josef Pieper, Guide to Thomas Aquinas (San Francisco : Ignatius Press, 1991), pp.43-44 ; R.T. Wallis, Neoplatonism (London : Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1972), pp.168-169.

real Aristotle" (14). More recently Henle, in his textual study of the relationship between Aquinas and Platonism, suggests that the image of Aquinas in earlier works as a slavish follower of Aristotle is false and too simplistic and he argues for a closer examination of the Platonic themes in Aquinas' writings (15). There have been others who regard Aquinas' Fourth Way of establishing God's existence as a Platonic argument (16) and Brian Davies in a recent work on St. Thomas also remarks on the influence of Platonism in Thomistic thought (17). Finally, there is Hankey's comprehensive study of the influence of Proclus on Aquinas' doctrine of God in Summa Theologica (18).

What emerges from these and other writings is the impression that there is a definite place in Thomistic studies for a greater debate on the whole issue of Aquinas'

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(14) William Ralph Inge, The Philosophy of Plotinus Vol I (London : Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., 1918), p.15.

(15) R.J. Henle S.J., Saint Thomas and Platonism (The Hague: Martinus Nijoff, 1956), p.xvi et seq.

(16) Cf. e.g. Anthony Kenny, The Five Ways (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p.71 et seq.

(17) Brian Davies, The Thought of Thomas Aquinas (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1992), p.16.

(18) W.J. Hankey, God in Himself (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1987).

Platonism and for more research which aims to interpret his approach in the light of the Platonism in his thought. Such an undertaking must inevitably challenge the more traditional perception of St. Thomas as a Christian thinker who has been mainly influenced by Aristotle and may even seem to contradict Aquinas' own assessment of his work. However, Pieper argues that it is necessary to take into account the Platonism in Aquinas' approach because he thinks that the traditional view has tended to obstruct a real understanding of St. Thomas for decades (19). All of this suggests the need to cast a fresh eye on the work of Aquinas and to make a fresh start, as it were, in assessing what he had to say about how we can best come to know God in the light of this Platonism.

Such is the aim of the present study which argues that Aquinas' interpretation of how the human mind can attain the most sublime form of theological knowledge can only be fully understood when his Platonism is taken into account. The term Platonism refers here to the views both of Plato and of his followers, notably the more prominant of these such as Plotinus and Proclus (20). This inclusive use of the term is

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(19) Josef Pieper, Guide to Thomas Aquinas, p.43.

(20) For a brief sketch of the Platonic influences on St. Thomas, see Mary T. Clark (ed.), An Aquinas Reader (London : Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1972), pp.25-27.

generally in keeping with Aquinas' own view of the Platonic tradition of thought whose representatives he describes as "Platonici" (21). It is irrelevant to this study as to whether Aristotle's thought can be distinguished from that of Plato in the way in which St. Thomas seems to envisage. What is important is that Aquinas himself for the most part perceived a clear distinction between them and yet he continued to use Platonism, whether consciously or not, to explain some of the most important aspects of his own views. This use of Platonism is not merely confined to the early texts, such as his commentary on Boethius' treatise on the Trinity (22). It is also to be found at various stages throughout the Thomistic writings where Aquinas discusses how the human mind can know God's essence. It exists, not

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(21) S.T.I.89.1.

(22) Gilson dates Super de Trin. circa 1257-58, M.-D. Chenu c. 1256 and Weisheipl c.1258-1260, all indicating that it is quite an early text. Cf. Edward Bullough (trans.), Etienne Gilson, The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas (New York : Dorset Press, 1929), p.7; A.-M. Landry O.P. & D. Hughes O.P. (trans.), M.-D. Chenu, Towards Understanding Saint Thomas (Chicago : Henry Regnery Company, 1964), p.277 ; James A. Weisheipl O.P., Friar Thomas D'Aquino (Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1974), p.382.

only in his study of the texts of Dionysius (23) but also in the relevant sections of his major works, Summa Contra Gentiles and Summa Theologica, where he explains how the human mind can see God (24). There are also his references to the boundary image of the soul which is Platonically inspired and occurs, for example, at the end of his response in Question 1 in Quest. Disp. De Anima (25). Whether he was fully aware of the implications of his use of Platonism, especially with regard to his adherence to Aristotle, is difficult to say. Aquinas may not have noticed the extent to which he depended on it to explain certain aspects of his thinking throughout his intellectual development. There is certainly evidence to suggest that he deliberately borrowed

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(23) Aquinas' commentary, In Dionysius de Divinis Nominibus is dated 1261 by Gilson, op. cit., p.7 and 1265-67 by Weisheipl, op.cit., p.382.

(24) Cf. e.g. S.C.G.II.68 & 81, III.61, IV.1 & 55, S.T.I.77.2 and S.T.II-II.Q.175. S.C.G. is dated from 1258-60/1259-64 by Gilson, op.cit., p.7, 1258-63 by Chenu op.cit., p.292 and 1258-69 by Weisheipl, op.cit., p.360. S.T. is dated 1267-73/1265-72 by Gilson, op.cit., p.7, 1267 -74 by Chenu, op.cit., p.300 and from 1266-73 by Weisheipl, op.cit., p.361.

(25) De An. is dated 1269-70/1260-68 by Gilson, op.cit., p.8 and 1269 by Weisheipl, op.cit., pp.364-365.

his views from Plato and from Proclus at times in relation to certain issues. He admits in S.T.I.6.4 to applying Plato's interpretation of subsisting goodness to his own understanding of God as the supreme good. He also indirectly acknowledges his debt to Proclus in S.C.G.III.61 for his use of the boundary formula of the soul, as will be seen in Chapter 3 of the present work. However, it would also seem that, in certain aspects of his treatment of how the human mind can think independently of the senses in the beatific vision, he uses Platonic insights in a way which suggests that perhaps he is not too conscious of their origin or at least if he is, he does not admit to this. Certainly, there is a degree of confusion evident in Aquinas' mind about his use of Platonism as is clear from S.T.I.89.1.

The approach taken will be to selectively identify those Platonic aspects of Aquinas' epistemological account of how we can come to know God and to determine their importance in his theory. This will involve drawing attention, where appropriate, to comparisons and points of contact between Aquinas' epistemological and psychological views with what has been said by adherents of the Platonic tradition of thought. The cumulative effect of this will be to demonstrate that Platonism is a formative influence of considerable importance in the Thomistic theory of how the human mind comes to know God, notably with regard to the kind of theological knowledge that is obtained

independently of the senses and of the body, as Aquinas believes will happen during the beatific vision. It will also become clear in the course of this enquiry that he is no longer able to use his knowledge of Aristotle to explain how the latter knowledge could take place. Instead, it will be shown that Thomas relies on what amounts to a Platonic account of non - sensory cognition and by adopting such an approach, he is implicitly admitting that Platonism has shown him the way forward in accounting for how the mind can function independently of the senses at the most sublime level of cognition attainable by the human intellect. This, however, does not deny the considerable influence that Aristotelianism exerted on his thought. However, it will be suggested here that for his interpretation of how the human mind can see God's essence, it is Aquinas' Platonism which is of far greater significance than his Aristotelianism.

It is also clear from the Thomistic writings that Aquinas displays a definite preference for non - sensory cognition as a better way of knowing reality compared with its sensory - based counterpart. He is, however, hesitant about voicing this opinion and hedges his conclusion in with various qualifications which are designed to point out how natural, appropriate and desirable it is for human beings to obtain knowledge by sensory and bodily experience. Nevertheless, despite such protestations, there is little doubt but that he regarded non - sensory cognition as vastly

superior to the discursive form of human reasoning that is based on sense experience. Aquinas' views on this are captured in his frequent comparisons between human and angelic knowledge. He shared with his contemporaries, both Christians and others, a belief in the existence of angelic spirits and attributed an intuitive level of superior intelligence to them. This view is also to be found in the writings of Platonism which regards such superior intelligences as highly placed in the hierarchy of being. The inferiority of the human mind compared with the angelic is not only a frequent theme in the Thomistic account of knowledge generally but is of considerable importance in his theory of how the human mind can best come to know God. The following passage provides a good example of Aquinas' view of the advantages of the angelic mind over its human counterpart :

> So, likewise the lower, namely, the human, intellects obtain their perfection in the knowledge of truth by a kind of movement and discursive intellectual operation ; that is to say, as they advance from one known thing to another. But, if from the beginning of a known principle they were straightway to perceive as known all its consequent conclusions, then there would be no discursive process at all. Such is the condition of the angels, because in the truths

> which they know naturally, they at once behold all things whatsoever that can be known in them. Therefore they are called intellectual beings : because even with ourselves the things which are constantly grasped by the mind are said to be understood ; hence intellect is defined as the habit of first principles. But human souls which acquire the truth by the discursive method are called rational ; and this comes from their feebleness of intellect. For if they possessed the fulness of light, like the angels, then in the first aspect of principles they would at once comprehend their whole range, by perceiving whatever could be reasoned out from them.
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> (S.T.I.58.3)

One might ask in passing just what is the point of knowing, as the angelic mind can, all the implications of any given proposition. In the extract just quoted, this attribute is clearly a sign of intellectual superiority. It must also be said that, for Aquinas, the most important feature of the angelic mind (and of the human) concerns its orientation to God. The mind that is disposed towards God, whether angelic or human, has an inestimable advantage over that which turns away from God's presence. From this point of view, the importance of any knowledge and of the implications of any given proposition is wholly determined

by whether or not and to what degree this enables the mind to advance to God. It is in this context that Aquinas' speculations on the angelic intelligences, including his belief in their influence on human minds both before and after death, must be assessed (26). Irrespective of whether or not we agree with him on the existence of angels, what is clear from the passage quoted above is that, for Aquinas, the non - sensory model of cognition represents a better way of knowing reality than the discursive sensory - based mind.

There is the additional factor that perfect knowledge consists of knowing the principles of things, namely, why and what a thing is. No finite mind, however, can fully understand all the principles of what exists in reality. The angelic mind knows the principles of certain things intuitively but cannot naturally understand why and what God is any more than the human mind can. The latter, however, is inferior to the angelic intellect because of its natural relationship with the senses before death when procuring knowledge. Aquinas insists that even after death the human mind still retains its inferior status because the soul's state of separation from the body is somehow not natural and it still maintains a potential relationship with its matter (27). Thus it is the material factor that marks the

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(26) Cf. S.T.I.QQ.50-64.

(27) S.C.G.IV.81.

human mind's lower status compared with the angelic intellect. No finite mind, however, is naturally capable of possessing God's knowledge of the divine nature and of the underlying principles of creation. This, in brief, is the theory of a hierarchy of minds, the human, the angelic and the divine, which also underlies Aquinas' explanation of the human mind's ascent to God. The natural state of human cognition is limited to discovering God's agency from sensory experience but when the human mind functions independently of the senses, it can see what God is. Such is Aquinas' doctrine of how we know God. For someone who perceives himself to be a follower of Aristotle, the latter half of this teaching must be problematic and Aquinas certainly displays considerable unease and even some degree of mental anguish at the tension in his account. This is particularly noticeable in S.T.I.89.1 where he speculates on how the mind can function without the senses or the body after death. Nevertheless, on the whole, Aquinas still thinks that the best model for cognition, and for knowing God in particular, is one where the mind functions independently of the senses. This results in the rather bizarre outcome, in epistemological terms, of the co - existence of two apparently conflicting theories in his account of knowledge, one holding with Aristotle that human knowledge is naturally sense - based while the other claims with Platonism that the most sublime form of knowledge

occurs independently of the senses and the body. In another twist to this, for example in his account of rapture, Aquinas maintains that the senses can impede the mind when it is trying to come to know God (28). This emphasis on the intellect's independence of the senses and the suggestion that the latter may prevent the human mind from seeing God are claims which again do not seem to fit with the thinking of someone who states that he prefers the approach of Aristotle to that of Plato. It is finally rather puzzling to find that so little attention has been hitherto devoted to this Platonism in the Thomistic theory of non - sensory based knowledge.

This analysis of Aquinas' account of how the human mind comes to know God will take place in five stages. The first chapter will present a general outline of his theory. This will include a discussion of the kind of natural knowledge of God that is gleaned from sensory experience which involves knowledge by negation and analogy. This will be followed by a brief examination of Aquinas' claim that knowledge by faith is theologically necessary and will conclude with an account of his interpretation of the cognitive steps involved in the mind's ascent to God. The latter provides a good example of the Platonism in Aquinas' thought. The content of this chapter will then form the

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(28) Cf. Chapter I, Section 1.4 and Chapter 4.

background against which a more detailed analysis of Aquinas' epistemological approach will take place in the chapters which follow. Chapter 2 will examine Aquinas' account of how the soul can function cognitively both with and independently of the body and the difficulties that arise from this. Chapter 3 discusses his boundary formula which enables Thomas to explain the duality of human knowledge. The image of the human soul and of human existence lying in - between the realms of the bodily and the incorporeal and between time and eternity is crucial for understanding Aquinas' two epistemological approaches and for his theory of how we can best come to know God. The metaphor itself is taken from the tradition of Platonism and specifically from Proclus. Chapter 4 will examine Aquinas' belief that some people can see what God is before death during the experience of rapture. He thought that St. Paul had had such an experience and, in setting out to explain how this might have occurred, Aquinas hints at some of the mechanisms that may operate in the beatific vision of the resurrection after death. Chapter 5 examines certain aspects of the Thomistic account of the beatific vision after death. These include Aquinas' theory of human bodiliness in the beatific vision of the resurrection, the importance of contemplation and divine enlightenment, the consequences of the beatific vision and the question of God's ultimate unknowability even when the divine essence is

finally made visible. Throughout the work, references, where appropriate, will be made to the Platonic features of the Thomistic account and it is hoped that, in this way, a plausible case will be established for concluding that the Platonic heritage in Aquinas is a significant feature of his theory about how the human mind can best come to know God.

Chapter I

The Thomistic Theory of How We Come to Know God

I.1. A Summary of Aquinas' Position

Before examining Aquinas' theory on how we can best come to know God, something needs to be said about his general understanding of how the human mind attains theological knowledge. He provides a useful summary of this in an early text, his commentary on Boethius' treatise on the Trinity. In Question I, Article 2, he enquires as to whether or not the human mind can attain any knowledge of God at all : "Utrum mens humana possit ad Dei notitiam pervenire". One might ask why Aquinas, as Christian believer and theologian, found it necessary to concern himself with this issue since he was clearly convinced about God's existence and believed in divine revelation. The answer lies in one of the main objectives of the Thomistic project which is to demonstrate that a close relationship exists between reason and faith. This tradition goes back to the very beginnings of Christianity itself and is found in the early Christian writers. It took the form of "fides quaerens intellectum" or faith seeking understanding, a theme that is perhaps most dramatically expressed in the prayer of St. Anselm which precedes his very controversial Ontological Argument (1).

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(1) Alvin Plantinga (ed.), The Ontological Argument (London & Melbourne, 1983), p.3.

Aquinas analyses the relationship between reason and faith in a number of texts (e.g. in Summa Contra Gentiles) and concludes that, in general, there is a harmonious and complementary partnership between them. It is in this context that he sets out to establish how the human mind can know God by means of sensory experience. This leads him to conclude that God's agency can be humanly known by reflecting on the existence of things in the surrounding world. Such reflection, according to Aquinas, points to the existence of a primary unchanged source of motion and an uncaused cause of everything that exists. These and similar conclusions emerge from his consideration of the ultimate implications of the world of our experience and they constitute Aquinas' ways of establishing the existence of God (2). He thinks that such reflection can also provide information about what God is not, for example, as something that is not moved or caused. This knowledge is obtained by differentiating God from other things, about which more shall be said later. The counterpart to this is based on the principle that every cause is somehow 'in' its effects which suggests that when we know something about the latter, we can also glean some information about the former. Aquinas describes this as knowledge by analogy or likeness, a process which will also be examined in some more detail

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(2) S.C.G.I.13 & S.T.I.2.3.

below. Knowledge of God's causality thus provides us with certain conclusions about divine existence, which Aquinas describes as a knowledge of "quod est". He distinguishes this from knowing God's essence ("quid est") by claiming that the latter wholly transcends our natural reasoning and the ability of any finite mind, no matter how sublime (3). The distinction thus represents a qualitative difference between inferring that God exists as the ultimate agent responsible for what is caused and the capacity to know what God is in Himself. The former knowledge will always relate to the effects in some way and God will be known in terms of these either as different from (unmoved, uncaused and so on) or somehow like them (good, intelligent etc.). Knowledge of God's essence, however, is in terms of what God essentially is, irrespective of any relationship between divine and created reality. The knowledge of God's essence, which transcends every created intellect, can only be revealed by God alone since only God is capable of completely comprehending Himself. This revelation occurs in response to faith and by means of the ultimate beatific vision. Faith extends the range of what can be known about God's nature by providing knowledge that is naturally inaccessible to the human mind and it also guarantees more certainty for our natural theological knowledge, as will be

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(3) S.T.I.56.3.

later seen. Aquinas sums up the relationship between faith and reason in De Veritate 14.10 ad 9 by declaring that faith does not destroy reason but goes beyond it and perfects it. Finally, there is the knowledge of God's essence in the beatific vision which is also brought about by supernatural means. None of these, however, including the beatific vision, threatens divine transcendence, according to Aquinas, since, even in beatitude, God can never be fully known by any finite mind (4).

In Question 1, Article 2 of the commentary on Boethius' Trinitarian treatise, Aquinas explains that the human mind's dependence on sensory images for the abstraction of meaning prevents us from knowing God directly, face to face. This is because God is incorporeal and transcends all images. However, the kind of theological knowledge which is attainable on the basis of the causal relationship between God and the divine effects can give us what might be described as an indirect knowledge of God. The more we understand about these effects, claims Aquinas, the greater will be our knowledge of their cause. Hence, his interest in scientific knowledge of all kinds and his view that theology resides at the pinnacle of the sciences. In accordance with the Proclean principle that every effect

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(4) S.C.G.III.55 & 56. See also Ch.5 in this work.

has a derivative likeness to its cause (5), Aquinas suggests that since God is in a special way the cause of the more sublime divine effects, we can learn more about God by considering these at length. This forms the basis of analogy. The reverse of this principle is that since no effect is exactly like its cause (6), the more we can differentiate God from other things, the greater will be our knowledge of divine transcendence. It is of interest to note that, whereas in this early Thomistic text, the way of negation is given the primacy of place, Aquinas, in his later writings, allows it to be preceded by the *via analogica* (7). This may indicate that he revised his opinion of its importance in the light of what he perceived to be its tendency towards agnosticism which he thought was reflected in Maimonides' treatment of it in *The Guide of the Perplexed*. This point will be developed later. In his commentary on Boethius' Trinitarian text, however, Aquinas has this to say about negation :

> God as an unknown is said to be the terminus of our knowledge in the following respect : that the mind is found to be most perfectly in possession

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(5) E.R. Dodds (trans. and commentary), *Proclus The Elements of Theology* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1933), Prop.18.

(6) Ibid., Prop.7.

(7) e.g. in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book I.

of knowledge of God when it is recognised that His essence is above everything that the mind is capable of apprehending in this life ; and thus although what He is remains unknown, yet it is known that He is. (Super De Trin.I.2 ad 1)

Aquinas also proceeds in this text to identify the importance of faith as a means of extending the range of our theological knowledge. He briefly notes its limitations too, adding that it does not provide the face to face (facie ad faciem) knowledge of God that is available in the beatific vision. It is now time to examine some of these points in more detail.

I.2. Negation and Divine Simplicity

I.2.1. Negation in the Platonic Tradition

It is worth pointing out that the Thomistic view of negation shares certain features in common with how negative knowledge is portrayed in the tradition of Platonism. As far back as the Platonic Socrates, there is evidence of the importance of this form of knowledge as a precondition for wisdom (Apology 20D-23B). The theory in The Republic that the Good is indefinable, difficult to grasp and only visible in its effects also hints at the need for 'negative recognition'. In addition, The Symposium describes beauty in negative terms, stating that it does not take :

the form of a face, or of hands, or of anything

> that is of the flesh. It will be neither words, nor knowledge, nor a something that exists in something else, such as a living creature, or of the earth, or the heavens, or anything that is - but subsisting of itself in an eternal oneness, while every lovely thing partakes of it in such a sort that, however much the parts may wax and wane, it will be neither more nor less, but still the same inviolable whole." (Symp.211AB)

The way of negation in Plato's writings is also suggested by his unwritten doctrine in The Seventh Letter 341C-D. However, it is The Parmenides that is most suggestive of the process of negation (and also of analogy) in terms of the methodology portrayed and the conclusions drawn. Here, the one is depicted as not being many, having no parts, not being a whole, having no beginning nor end, unlimited, shapeless, without location, timeless and immobile. It is also nameless and unknowable. Of course it can be argued that the only discernible message of Plato's Parmenides lies in its portrait of the capacity of dialectical reasoning to function in any given direction. While this may well be so, it does also seem as if the via negativa is uncannily prefigured here.

The Jewish thinker, Philo, who was influenced by Platonism, applied negative knowledge to his own religious setting. In his text, On the Unchangeableness of God, he

portrayed God as a "simple, naked being, without any definite characteristics" (Deus Imm.55) and said that educated intelligent people do not confer attributes on God from creation because :

> 'God is not as a man' but neither is he as heaven nor the material universe ... he is not apprehensible even by the mind, except merely in respect of his essence, the fact that he is. For his existence indeed is a fact which we can comprehend concerning him, but beyond the fact of his existence we can understand nothing. (Deus Imm.62)

Philo also insists that the unseen God is incorporeal, indefinable, unknowable, indescribable and self - sufficient. Central to his view, as it is to Aquinas also, is the importance of the Exodus text 3.14 which Philo interprets as :

> "My nature is to be, not to be spoken" (De Mut.11-12)

Philo employs philosophical language to analyse this text, referring to God as "He who is" (Deus Imm.110), "the Existent which truly exists" (Mut. Nom.7) and "the Existent Being who moves and turns all else is Himself exempt from moving and turning" (Poster.C.28). Philo believes that only negative language should apply to God since "He belongs to no class or kind" (Leg. All.I.36) and is "One, incorruptible and unchangeable" (Leg. All.I.51-52).

Plotinus, who was particularly interested in Plato's Parmenides and explored the relationship between the One and the Good, was also convinced of the importance of using negative language and thought. In Ennead V.4.1, he describes the One and the Good as being simple (8), self - sufficient and unknowable (9). In language reminiscent of the Parmenides, he depicts the One as formless and boundless unlike everything else (Enn.V.5.6) and difficult to speak of (Enn.VI.9.3). Plotinus claims that all our language about the Good is wholly inadequate (Enn.VI.8.8) and concludes that only negative language can describe it. Chapters 13 and 14 of Enn.V.3 are particularly interesting on this point and indicate the strain under which human language labours as a result of attempting to talk about the One. In Enn.V.3.13, Plotinus claims that its ineffable character throws our language into turmoil because, although we have to say that it is "something", yet the One utterly transcends everything. It is nameless and "we can say nothing of it" but are reduced to silence or to making "signs to ourselves about it". Its utter simplicity precludes "any thinking about it". This theme is continued in Enn.V.3.14 where Plotinus comments again on the frustration that human discourse encounters in relation to

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(8) Cf. also Enn.V.3.13 & VI.9.5.

(9) Enn.V.6.6.

the One. We say "what it is not, but we do not say what it is : so that we speak about what comes after it." (Enn.V.3.14) Aquinas will later adopt a somewhat similar tone in relation to via negativa.

I.2.2. Moses Maimonides

One thinker who was to exert a direct influence on Aquinas' perception of via negativa was Moses Maimonides, who, like Philo, developed his understanding of negation in the light of Exodus 3.14. Maimonides adopted a radical position by insisting that negation constituted the only means of humanly coming to know God. This position is outlined in his Guide of the Perplexed Book I, Chapters 50-60. Maimonides' approach is based on the principle that there is no correlation between the transcendent God and created things (G.P.I.52) which means that the relationship between human beings and God is virtually non - existent (G.P.I.56). Analogical knowledge of God is consequently impossible to attain which leaves only negation as a means of knowing God. Maimonides believes that God's unknowability is strongly supported by passages from Scripture (G.P.I.54) and is expressed in such negative attributes as divine changelessness, incorporeality, lack of potentiality and God's utter dissimilarity from everything else. God's divine simplicity is crucially marked by the identity of divine essence and existence (G.P.I.57), a point to which

Aquinas will also draw attention. Indeed, the following passage might have been written by St. Thomas himself :

> As for that which has no cause for its existence, there is only God, may He be magnified and glorified, who is like that. For this is the meaning of our saying about Him that His existence is necessary. Accordingly, His existence is identical with His essence and His true reality, and His essence is His existence. Thus His existence does not have an accident attaching to it when it exists, in which its existence would be a notion that is superadded to it. For His existence is necessary always ; it is not something that may suddenly come to Him nor an accident that may attain Him. Consequently He exists, but not through an existence that is other than His essence ; and similarly He lives but not through life (10); He is powerful but not through power ; He knows, but not through knowledge. For all these attributes refer back to one notion in which there is no idea of multiplicity ... (G.P.I.57)

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(10) The phrase, "other than His essence" is added here and after "not through power" and "not through knowledge". Cf. Shlomo Pines (trans.), Moses Maimonides, The Guide of the Perplexed (Chicago & London : The University of Chicago Press, 1963), p.132.

Many of these sentiments will later be found in Aquinas' analysis of the relationship between God's essence and existence (11). The importance of Exodus 3.14 for Maimonides is particularly evident in G.P.I.63 where he interprets God's self - revelation to Moses and his followers as "I am that I am". He describes its meaning as follows :

> This is a name deriving from the verb to be [hayah] which signifies existence, for hayah indicates the notion : he was. And in Hebrew there is no difference between your saying : he was, and he existed. The whole secret consists in the repetition in a predicative position of the very word indicative of existence. For the word that [in the phrase "I am that I am"] requires the mention of an attribute immediately connected with it .. Accordingly the first word is I am considered as a term to which a predicate is attached ; the second word that is predicated of the first is also I am, that is, identical with the first. Accordingly Scripture makes, as it were, a clear statement that the subject is identical with the predicate. This makes it clear that He is existent but not through existence. This notion may be

(11) Cf. S.C.G.I.22 & S.T.I.3.4.

summarised in the following way : the existent that is the existent or the necessarily existent. This is what demonstration necessarily leads to, namely, the view that there is a necessarily existent thing that has never been, or ever will be, non - existent. (G.P.I.63)

Maimonides explains why the description of God by negation is effective :

> Know that the description of God, may He be cherished and exalted, by means of negations is the correct description ... that is not affected by indulgence in facile language and does not imply any deficiency with respect to God in general or in any particular mode. On the other hand, if one describes Him by means of affirmations, one implies ... that He is associated with that which is not He and implies a deficiency in Him. (G.P.I.58)

Only negation then can direct the mind towards the most fundamental truth about God according to Maimonides. This basic divine truth is that God is simple and Maimonides is so convinced of this that he regards those who claim to have a positive knowledge of God as merely betraying their own unacknowledged lack of belief.

1.2.3. Aquinas and the Way of Negation

Many of the ideas outlined above emerge once again in the Thomistic account of the negative way. Aquinas seems to have been interested in negation from quite an early stage in his writings as can be seen from what he has to say in Q.I Art.2 of his commentary on Boethius' treatise on the Trinity. He describes negative knowledge as follows in his commentary on Dionysius' text on the Divine Names :

> there is ... that most divine knowledge of God, which is attained by unknowing in a union that transcends the mind, when the mind recedes from all things and then leaves even itself, and is united to the supersplendent rays, being illuminated in them and from them by the unsearchable depth of wisdom. (12)

There is a certain ambiguity here about whether such enlightenment occurs either before or after death. Another question that arises concerns the way in which Aquinas at this stage thought of the relationship between negative and mystical knowledge. What is clear is that the general Thomistic treatment of negation, as contained in Summa Contra Gentiles and Summa Theologica is depicted in terms of

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(12) M.C. D'Arcy (ed.), Thomas Aquinas Selected Writings (London & New York : J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd. and E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., 1939), pp.186-187.

a process of mental differentiation rather than as some kind of mystical experience.

Aquinas' account of negation in Summa Contra Gentiles, Book I, Chs.14-27 is considerably detailed with each chapter forming a link in a chain of inter - connected and tightly - woven arguments which result in a comprehensive list of negative divine attributes. The parallel and complimentary discussion that occurs in Summa Theologica, Part I, Q.3 is more concerned, by contrast, with the issue of divine simplicity. Both texts broadly follow a similar pattern, not just in relation to what is discussed but also by being immediately prefaced with arguments for God's existence, the conclusions of which then serve as premisses for the subsequent analysis of the negative way.

Before Aquinas embarks on the negative way in Summa Contra Gentiles Book I, where he calls it via remotionis, he explains his reasons for doing so in S.C.G.I.14. He maintains that divine transcendence requires the removal from our notion of God of any attributes that do not apply to the divine nature - hence the significance of the title, via remotionis. This process must, however, imply some kind of prior knowledge about God which, in this case, is provided by the preceding arguments for God's existence, for example in the conclusion that God is immutable. Aquinas goes on to say that since God's essence transcends every form to which the human mind can reach, no human being can

understand what God is but only what God is not, the latter being made possible by the progressive removal of all inapplicable attributes from the notion of God, as mentioned above. In a passage that recalls Maimonides' position, Thomas explains :

> For the more completely we see how a thing differs from others, the more perfectly we know it : since each thing has in itself its own being distinct from all other things. Wherefore when we know the definition of a thing, first we place it in a genus, whereby we know in general what it is, and afterwards we add differences so as to mark its distinction from other things : and thus we arrive at the complete knowledge of a thing's essence. (S.C.G.I.14)

This knowledge by genus and differentia is clearly derived from Aristotelianism but is also to be found in the definition of knowledge in Plato's Theaetetus as "correct belief together with a knowledge of a differentness" (210A). The difficulty with applying this procedure to God is that God transcends all genera and therefore cannot be distinguished from other things by this kind of differentiation which would require a prior knowledge of what God is. Instead, other things must be made the point of reference for distinguishing God from them. Aquinas emphasises that although negative differentiation enables

us to reflect on divine transcendence, we are still unable to know what God essentially is. Chapter 14 concludes by assuming the immutability of God as a premiss for the next chapter, a conclusion which was itself previously established in Ch.13. Thus begins the chain of interrelated arguments from Chapter 15 onwards where the discussion in each succeeding chapter emerges from the content of its predecessor, a method which is also found, though not as tightly structured, in the series of eight articles in S.T.I.Q.3.

By adopting the negative way, Aquinas can argue that God is eternal and immutable, has no potentiality or capacity of any kind and is wholly actual and uncaused. Other negative attributes include God's immateriality and non - composition, the corollory of the latter being that God is simple (13). Divine incorporeality is clearly an important issue for Aquinas, as indeed it was for Maimonides and Philo, because of the danger presented by an anthropomorphic view of God. It is discussed at length in S.C.G.I.20 and constitutes the content of the first article of S.T.I.Q.3 (14). One intriguing reason put forward by Aquinas in S.T.I.3.1 for divine incorporeality is that God's

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(13) Cf. also S.C.G.I.18 & S.T.I.3.2.

(14) The incorporeality of the One and the Good is also a feature of Plotinian thought.

supremely noble status is incompatible with bodiliness. In addition he states that God does not constitute a bodily form of any kind and is not the formal being of things but rather transcends all genera (15).

Aquinas also concludes by means of the negative way that God is identical with the divine essence (S.C.G.I.21). The corresponding argument in S.T.I.3.3 explains this conclusion by stating that although humanity (humanitas) formally defines what it is to be human, this term does not include the individual features of each human being such as "this flesh, these bones and the accidental qualities distinguishing this particular matter" (S.T.I.3.3). By contrast with the material individual human being, God is not composed of matter and form but is wholly formal and therefore identical with the divine form or essence.

I.2.4 God's Simplicity in Essence and Existence

One of the central issues associated with the Thomistic view of negation is its role in equating God's essence and existence, as is clear from S.C.G.I.22. For Aquinas, this equation is critical in signifying the unique nature of God's simplicity. David Burrell describes divine simplicity

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(15) Cf. S.C.G.I.27, I.26 & S.T.I.3.5.

as a formal feature of divinity (16) and its importance for Aquinas is evident from his introductory remarks to the eight articles of S.T.I.Q.3 where he claims that when we deny whatever is opposed to the idea of God (such as composition and motion), we are in effect simultaneously declaring that God is simple. This is also the single conclusion that emerges from S.T.I.3.7 which summarises the content of the previous six articles and declares as a result that God is simple.

Negation thus establishes for St. Thomas that God's simplicity is uniqely represented in the nature of divine existence and this represents in a special way the climax of the Thomistic preoccupation with the notion of existence which is widespread in Aquinas' writings. He depicts the act of existence (esse) as an intrinsically dynamic ongoing process that constitutes each entity's most fundamental perfection (S.T.I.4.1 ad 3). The conceptual elusiveness of esse has led to discussions about whether existence represents a true attribute at all (17). However, Levinas captures its enigmatic character rather well in the

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(16) David B. Burrell, "Distinguishing God from the World", in Brian Davies O.P., (ed.), Language, Meaning and God (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1987), pp.75-91, (here pp.75-77).
(17) G.E. Moore, "Is Existence a Predicate ?", in Alvin Plantinga (ed.), The Ontological Argument, pp.71-85.

following extract :

> The distinction between that which exists and its existence itself, between the individual, the genus, the collective, God, beings designated by substantives, and the event or act of their existence, imposes itself upon philosophical reflection - and with equal facility disappears from its view. It is as though thought becomes dizzy pouring over the emptiness of the verb to exist, which we seem not to be able to say anything about, which only becomes intelligible in its participle, the existent, that which exists. Thought slips imperceptibly from the notion of Being qua Being, that by virtue of which an existing being exists, to the idea of a cause of existence, a 'Being in general', a God whose essence will indeed contain existence, but which will nonetheless be a 'being', and not the deed, pure event or work, of Being. This latter will be understood in confusion with beings. (18)

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(18) Alphonse Lingis (trans.), Emmanuel Levinas, Existence and Existents (Dordrecht/Boston/London : Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1978), p.17.

The experience of contemplating esse per se, as Levinas astutely points out, is too often swiftly obliterated by a mental leap into causal attribution which is perhaps most strikingly represented in the work of Leibniz (19). Here the question of why there is something rather than nothing is immediately resolved in a way which, while being philosophically sound, does divert one's attention to divine causality from what Levinas describes as "the fact that there is" (20). It can be argued that despite Aquinas' concerns for divine causality, as in the Five Ways for instance, he does encourage reflection on the mystery of existing as such, most notably in the discussion in S.T.I.13.11 on Qui Est as the most proper name for God, as will be mentioned later. This concern with the importance of esse derives from his view of its primacy as the fundamental condition which grounds the objective reality of all things, and applies especially to God, as he explains in this passage :

> The act of existing itself is the highest act in which all things are capable of participating, but an act of existing itself does not participate in anything. Therefore, if there is a being which is

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(19) G.H.R. Parkinson (ed.), Leibniz Philosophical Writings (London : J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1973), p.145.

(20) Emmanuel Levinas, Existence and Existents, p.21.

> itself a subsisting act of existing (ipsum esse subsistens), just as we speak of God, we say that it does not participate in anything. However, this is not true of other subsisting forms which necessarily participate in the act of existing itself, and which are related to it as potency to act ; and thus, since these forms are in potentiality in some measure, they can participate in something else. (De An.6 ad 2)

The definition of God in this passage as a subsisting act of existence distinguishes the divine being from other subsisting intelligences such as the angelic substances or human souls separated from their bodies. In such cases, Aquinas thinks that these forms have a capacity to exist which God does not possess. To be God, on the contrary, means always to necessarily exist, whereas, conceptually speaking, one might think of other forms or essences without necessarily accepting that they exist. Put like this, it does rather seem as if Aquinas is coming close to the thrust of Anselm's Ontological Argument which fundamentally suggests that we cannot think of God as that unique being than Whom nothing greater can be conceived without accepting as a necessary consequence that such a being, namely God, exists. It is this kind of argument which is suggested in one of Aquinas' early texts, On Being and Essence, where in Chapter IV he introduces a discussion on the relationship

between essence and existence by claiming that one can think of the essence of something while not knowing whether it actually exists or not :

> I can know what a man or a phoenix is and still be ignorant whether it exists in reality. From this it is clear that the act of existing is other than essence or quiddity, unless, perhaps, there is a being whose quiddity is its very act of existing. (21)

In other words, it is our conceptual ability to distinguish between the essence of a thing and its act of existing that enables us to conclude that essence and existence are distinct. Aquinas goes on to argue that there can be only one primary being, whose essence and act of existence (esse) are not distinct from each other and which is its very act of existing. This argument in On Being and Essence seems to take the form more of a declared assumption rather than a demonstrated conclusion (22). Although a question arises here as to whether Aquinas' distinction between

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(21) Armand Maurer (trans.), On Being and Essence by St. Thomas Aquinas (Toronto : The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1949), p.46.

(22) Cf. also John F. Wippel, Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas (Washington D.C. : The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), pp.107-132.

essence and existence is purely epistemological in nature, a reading of other texts such as S.C.G.II.52 indicates that Aquinas also thought that the distinction could be ontologically justified (23).

The role that divine necessity plays in the equation of God's essence and existence emerges in S.C.G.I.22. The theme of God's necessary existence is to be found, not only in Aquinas' Third Way, but is somehow implied in all his arguments for God's existence. Put simply, Aquinas thinks that for anything to exist, God must exist as its primary cause, that the very fact of reality requires God to be. Such existential necessity is related, he thinks, in a more primary way to God's uncaused actuality. Avicenna had also written earlier (as indeed had Maimonides) about a unique necessary Existent that is immutable, unified and eternal from which all contingent things come. More importantly, and leaving aside any discussion on Avicenna's view that in every other case existence has an accidental connotation, the Islamic philosopher held that the essence of the necessary Existent is none other than its existence on the grounds that this necessary Existent could not be the

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(23) On the basis of an entity's causality, for example.

effect of any cause (24). It is interesting to note, incidentally, that despite his difficulties with Avicenna on this subject, Aquinas seems to have been influenced at certain points by the Islamic philosopher's distinction between essence and existence (25). Like Philo and Maimonides, St. Thomas also cites in S.C.G.I.22 in support of his own case, the passage from Exodus 3.14 where God is revealed as I Am Who Am. The discussion in S.T.I.3.4 follows a rather similar path, citing God's uncaused existence, actuality and total identity with His essence as reasons for equating divine essence and existence. It also raises the point that it would be a contradiction to suggest that God merely participated in existence as distinct from being His own existence. It is only creatures who have to participate in this way because of their derivative existence compared with God's uncaused existence which comes from no external source. Aquinas also points out in S.T.I.13.11 that the reality of divine existence is formulated most appropriately in the divine name, Qui Est, as stated in Exodus 3.14. This name reflects the unique present and primary existence that

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(24) Parviz Morewedge, The Metaphysics of Avicenna (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), pp.53-56 & 59-60.

(25) For an account of this in Averroes, cf. Oliver Leaman, Averroes (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1988), pp.104-116.

is God's, the divine universality and the incommunicable mystery of the divine substance.

I.3 Analogical Knowledge and God's Goodness

I.3.1. The Argument for Analogy

Although clearly important for Aquinas, the negative way of knowing God required the partnership, he thought, of a more positive form of theological knowledge. The problem with negation alone is that, though it might be regarded as the only safe way of speaking about God, it can be difficult to distinguish from complete agnosticism (26). Aquinas seems to have been aware of this possibility as is evident from his criticisms of Maimonides' view of negation. Negative knowledge for St. Thomas thus requires to be supplemented with knowledge by analogy which is based on the causal relationship between God and other things that results in some likeness between them.

There are marked Platonic characteristics evident in the Thomistic account of analogy, especially in relation to the interpretation of divine goodness. Aquinas' equation of God with ultimate goodness, a view which he also attributed

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(26) Don Cupitt, Christ and the Hiddenness of God (London : S.C.M. Press, 1985), p.22.

to Plato in S.T.I.6.4 (27), is to some extent prefigured in the Platonic definition of the Good as ineffable, perpetually elusive and the goal of all endeavour (Rep.505E). Both Lyttkens and Taylor (28) remark that Plato's notion of the Good provided a reference point for later theological approaches to this subject, especially for the Christian writers. The views of Plotinus and Proclus on the One, from whom reality proceeds and to which it seeks to return, as the Good (29), are also reflected in the Thomistic account, especially in the approach taken in S.C.G.IV.1. In Enn.I.7.1, Plotinus states that the Good does not aspire to anything else but is the spring and origin of natural activities and gives other things "the form of good". The definitive characteristics of the Good, to which Plotinus repeatedly draws attention throughout his

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(27) Cf. also Plato's replacement of the Good in Republic 507D-520D with God in Laws 709B, 713E & 716CD.

(28) Hampus Lyttkens, The Analogy between God and the World, (Upsala : Almqvist and Wiksells, 1952), p.27 and A.E. Taylor, Plato: The Man and His Work (London & New York: Methuen, 1960), p.289.

(29) Ennead VI.9 & Proclus' Elements of Theology Prop.13.

writings, such as its transcendence (30), mystery (31), self - sufficiency (32) and generosity (33) were also regarded by Aquinas as attributes of God. Proclus, too, whose thinking influenced Aquinas through Liber de Causis, similarly argued in The Elements of Theology for the Good's transcendence and primacy (Props.8 & 12), its essential unknowability (Prop.123) and its drawing power which attracts all things to seek to return to it (Prop.31).

I.3.2. The Challenge of Agnostic Theology

When putting forward his view that it was valid to attribute perfections to God from finite reality, Aquinas had to contend with the position specifically represented by Maimonides that negative knowledge was the only means of truly coming to know God. The latter approach was undoubtedly motivated by a great respect for divine transcendence and was designed to combat an anthropomorphic view of God. In his defence of negation, Maimonides claims that positive attribution either represents a serious misunderstanding of God by imputing divine plurality where there is none or else merely confers pseudo - attributes which are not to be found in God who has no positive

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(30) Enn.V.4.1, I.7.1.

(31) Enn.VI.9.3.

(32) Enn.V.6.4 & III.8.11.

(33) Enn.VI.9.9.

attributes whatsoever (G.P.I.58). He cites, as an example, the description of God as a living being. The Jewish thinker's determination to protect divine transcendence and to prevent any attributes from being anthropomorphically conferred on God leads him to conclude that what is really meant here is that God does not belong to the category of non - living things. Maimoonides thinks that even when we positively attribute certain properties to God, this really amounts to negation under another guise. This does seem a rather forced interpretation, however, and Aquinas certainly was not in agreement with it, as he makes clear in S.T.I.13.2. St. Thomas, for his part, thought that this view represented a serious challenge to the possibility of knowing anything about God and therefore to his own position which held that analogy is a valid means of obtaining theological knowledge.

In S.T.I.13.2, Aquinas puts forward three arguments against Maimonides and he specifically cites the example mentioned above of attributing life to God. The first argument states that if there were no reason for applying one positive attribute rather than any other to God, it would not matter which one was used. This would make theological language utterly confusing and meaningless. Calling God good might then simply mean that God is the the cause of goodness. Equally, we could say that God is a body as the cause of bodies. His second argument continues

this line of thought by suggesting that if Maimonides is correct, such terms apply to God in a secondary rather than in a primary way. Aquinas rejects this, citing the example of health as a case in point, an illustration which he takes from Aristotle, although he uses it to suit his own purposes. Health has a primary reference to the animal that is healthy, insists Thomas, rather than to what makes things healthy, like medicine (34). This line of argument is also used in a subsequent discussion of the same issue in S.T.I.13.5. Aquinas thus claims that health in itself is secondary and predicated of other things that are primary in relation to it, such as medicine, urine and the animal body. This interpretation, of course, suited his theory of analogy by allowing him to say that, as regards God's causal relationship with things, though we may be ignorant of what God is, we can still extrapolate from the divine effects to God because of the likeness between them, the difference being one of proportion. The final argument in S.T.I.13.2 against Maimonides claims that when people attribute life to God, they mean more than merely saying that God is the cause

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(34) Cf. Gerard J. Hughes S.J., "Aquinas and the Limits of Agnosticism" in Gerard J. Hughes S.J. (ed.), The Philosophical Assessment of Theology (Kent & Washington : Search Press Ltd. & Georgetown University Press, 1987), pp.37-63. Cf. also S.T.I.13.2, 5 & S.C.G.I.34.

of their lives or is different from inanimate bodies but rather that, in the most sublime way, God is actually alive.

Although all three arguments appear to overlap to some extent and may seem somewhat repetitive and perhaps even question - begging, they demonstrate Aquinas' belief that analogical terms can substantially name God. However, St. Thomas warns that such knowledge of God is limited because of the disproportion between God and the divine effects.

I.3.3. The Basis of Positive Attribution

Aquinas' understanding of analogy forms part of a broader discussion in which he makes use of a principle from Proclus to explain how perfections can be attributed to God. Proclus' Elements of Theology declares that, although every cause transcends its effects (Props.7 & 75) :

> something must in every case pass over from the cause to the effect ; and especially must this be true of the first cause, from which all things depend and to which all things owe their several existence. (Prop.12)

Proclus goes on to explain in Prop.12 that, since things participate in the Good (an issue previously discussed in Prop.8), they must possess the character of goodness from their primary cause. The relationship between cause and

effect is that of likeness (Prop.29), the corollory of which is contained in Prop.32 which states that the condition of reversion and procession is likeness (35). As Proclus states in Prop.35 :

"Every effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and reverts upon it."

From this perspective, it is possible to conclude, as Aquinas does, that the effects of goodness are proportionately as good as the likeness is to whatever is good is good in itself, which, for St. Thomas, is God. This line of argument can ultimately be traced back to Plato, according to Lyttkens (36). However, the difficulty, of which Maimonides was aware, is that God can be thought of as somehow part of the same continuum as the divine effects, even if at the ultimate point (37). This is why negation is necessary to counterbalance the way of analogy.

It is now time to examine the Thomistic analysis of how things can be like God. Aquinas states in S.C.G.I.29 what in

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(35) Cf. E.R. Dodds (trans. and commentary), Proclus The Elements of Theology, p.219. This two way process is also discussed in S.C.G.IV.1.

(36) Cf. Hampus Lyttkens, The Analogy Between God and the World, pp.27 & 51-52.

(37) Maimonides tries to defend the transcendence of God's essence by distinguishing it from His actions in G.P.I.52.

essence is the Proclean view mentioned above when he claims that, though effects fall short of their cause, there is some likeness between them because "it is of the nature of action that a like agent should produce a like action, since everything acts according as it is in act." This is why Aquinas thinks that the form of an effect is to be found in some way in its transcendent cause, though differently and in a different ratio or proportion. He illustrates his point with the example of the sun's heat which brings to mind the Platonic metaphor of sunlight mentioned in The Republic (508DE) :

> For the sun causes heat in lower bodies by acting according as it is in act; wherefore the heat generated by the sun must needs bear some likeness to the sun's active power by which heat is caused in those lower bodies and by reason of which the sun is said to be hot, albeit in a different ratio. And thus it is said to be somewhat like all those things on which it efficaciously produces its effects, and yet again is unlike them all in so far as these effects do not possess heat and so forth in the same way as they are found in the sun. Thus also God bestows all perfections on things, and in consequence He is both like and unlike all. (S.C.G.I.29)

This is the order of ontological priority, according to

Aquinas, although he claims that, epistemologically, our cognitive ascent to God takes the opposite course, beginning with the divine effects and moving in reverse, as it were, to glean knowledge of their divine cause (38). He illustrates the ontological priority of God in S.C.G.I.29 by remarking on how it is as inappropriate to compare someone to their portrait, by using the latter as the reference point, as it is to compare God to creatures (39). The general tone employed by Aquinas, especially towards the end of Chapter 29, is evocative of the Platonic tradition as, for instance, in his claim that creatures imperfectly participate in what are properly divine perfections. Later in S.C.G.III.19, he will say that it is from their acquisition of goodness that creatures are like God, a view which also carries resonances of Platonism. This claim is formulated as part of a more extensive account of the teleological drive of each entity towards its good which will make it like God (40), a theme which is also to be found in the writings of Plato and Plotinus (41).

In S.T.I.4.3, there is a somewhat similar discussion in

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(38) Cf. e.g. S.C.G.I.13, IV.1 & S.T.I.2.3.

(39) In S.T.I.4.3 ad 4, Aquinas uses the artistic example of a male statue as compared with a man.

(40) S.C.G.III.2-22 & 24-25.

(41) Laws 716CD ; Enn.I.2.1.

the course of which different kinds of likenesses are outlined. First, Aquinas describes the equal likeness of two white objects. Then there is the imperfect likeness where one thing, for example, is whiter than another. Lastly, there is the kind of likeness that exists in the cause and effect relationship where things "communicate in the same forms, but not according to the same formality." (S.T.I.4.3) Aquinas makes a distinction in this category. If the cause and effect are part of the same species, such as parents and children, they will be formally alike since they are members of the same human species. However, if they belong to different species, this will not be the case. Here Aquinas gives as an example things that are generated by the sun's heat and which, while being like the sun (e.g. in heat), are not specifically but generically like it. The effects therefore contain the likeness of their cause, the sun, in a more distant way :

"effectus ejus adhuc magis accedent remote ad similitudinem formae agentis .." (S.T.I.4.3)

Aquinas concludes that divine effects analogically participate in the likeness of their cause and gives, as an example, the case of esse or the act of existing which all beings have in common :

"In this way all created beings, so far as they are beings (entia), are like God as the first and universal principle of all being (esse)." (S.T.I.4.3)

Without straining the comparison, it is fair to say that the views of Aquinas and Plotinus on this issue are not unlike each other on certain points. Plotinus in Enn.I.2.2, for example, notes two kinds of likenesses, one which requires that "there should be something the same in the things that are alike" in the case of things that derive their likeness equally from the same principle, the other where one thing is primary and something else resembles it. In the latter case, Plotinus claims that likeness has to be understood, not as the same form in both, but as different since likeness has come about in a different way. He does not try to develop this any further in the text in question, though it is interesting to note that he makes some textual references to the archetype towards which virtuous actions should be directed and to the Good in which the soul is able to participate. Aquinas' view of creaturely likeness to God contains some echoes of Plotinus' second category where the form of divine likeness in creatures is proportionate to their mode of being. Even when the mind sees God by means of the divine likeness in the beatific vision, there is a difference, according to Aquinas, between this and the relationship that God has with His own divine likeness by means of which He knows Himself. This difference, Thomas tells us in S.C.G.III.53, relates to the created mind's participation in the divine likeness. God,

however, does not participate in but rather is, this divine likeness. Plotinus remarks that likeness is a flight to God (Enn.I.2.3), probably with Theaetetus 176AB in mind, and he claims that the soul's likeness to God lies in its intellectual activity, a conclusion with which Aquinas would strongly concur (42). None of this aims to suggest that there was some form of transmission between Plotinus and Aquinas on the subject of likeness and analogical knowledge. The evidence, however, of a shared viewpoint on certain aspects of analogy does suggest a form of Platonism in Aquinas' thinking on this issue which is quite significant.

It is this duality of like and unlike between God and the divine effects which constitutes the basis of analogical predication. As a cognitive method, analogy is prefigured in such Platonic metaphors as the Line (Rep.509D-511E), sun and light (Rep.508A et seq.) and the eye (Rep.518CD). It is also hinted at in Plato's Parmenides, as was earlier mentioned. Aquinas' belief in the importance of analogy is evident from the considerable space which he devotes to discussing it in Summa Contra Gentiles Book I, Chapter 32 and 33 where he rejects any kind of theological attribution which is either univocal or equivocal. The former would mean that the level of perfections in God and in the divine effects are the same

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(42) Cf. also S.C.G.III.25.

whereas equivocal attribution would imply that there is no link whatever between God and other things, something which would contradict the nature of divine causality. Aquinas concluded that only analogical attribution respects both divine transcendence and causality.

I.3.4. Analogy and Divine Goodness

It was earlier stated that Aquinas regarded esse (or the act of existence) as the most fundamental perfection that anything possesses and he also saw it as being linked, not only with negation, but also with analogy. Whereas the former indicates the central role of esse in relation to God's simplicity, analogical knowledge reveals the relationship of esse and divine goodness. Aquinas links esse and goodness by claiming that the act of existence signifies a thing's basic perfection while goodness means the perfection of what is desirable (S.T.I.5.1). Both are convertible with each other in the case of God Whose existence and goodness are supremely simple :

"God's being is His perfect goodness .." (S.C.G.III.20)

Goodness is analogical, according to Aquinas (S.T.I.5.6 ad 3), since creatures merely participate in goodness whereas God is identical with it (S.C.G.I.38). God thus contains all goodness (S.C.G.I.40) whereas other things imitate divine goodness according to their mode of being (S.C.G.III.20).

Aquinas develops this discussion in an explicitly Platonic way in S.T.I.6.4 where he accepts Plato's theory of participation as an especially apt model for explaining how things share in the goodness of God. He begins by stating that, though he does not agree with Plato that things participate in separate subsisting ideas, he agrees with Plato's view that God is the absolute good "from which all things are called good by way of participation."

Aquinas' assessment of Plato's understanding of this issue may very well be correct since there is evidence for this conclusion from The Republic (Books VI and VII) and Laws (716CD and 803C) that Plato thought of the Good and God as equivalent terms that map the same primary reality. In addition, a central lesson of The Republic aims to teach human beings how to participate in the Good. Aquinas describes the Platonic view as asserting that primary reality is "quod per suam essentiam est ens, et bonum" and he concludes that this is what we call God : "dicebat esse Deum". The use of the latter phrase is suggestive of the conclusions reached at the end of the arguments in the Five Ways of demonstrating God's existence. The thrust of S.T.I.6.4 is reminiscent of the approach adopted in the Fourth Way (S.T.I.2.3) which establishes God's existence in terms which Anthony Kenny and others have identified as a

Platonic argument (43). This states that because things in our experience are more or less good, true, noble and so on, there must be something primary which is the best, the truest and the noblest :

> Therefore there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other kind of perfection ; and this we call God. (S.T.I.2.3).

It seems that the thinking expressed in Aquinas' Fourth Way may well underlie his treatment of divine goodness in S.T.I.6.4 and, although Thomas does attempt to put the authoritative stamp of Aristotelianism on his account by citing Aristotle's support for his conclusions, it would seem that Plato's is by far the greater influence on his thinking at this point. This is further suggested by the following passage:

> Hence from the first being, essentially such, and good, everything can be called good and a being, inasmuch as it participates in it by way of a certain assimilation which is far removed and defective...
>
> Everything is therefore called good from the divine goodness, as from the first exemplary

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(43) Anthony Kenny, The Five Ways (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1969), pp.70-95.

> effective and final principle of all goodness. Nevertheless, everything is called good by reason of the similitude of the divine goodness belonging to it, which is formally its own goodness, whereby it is denominated good. And so of all things there is one goodness, and yet many goodnesses.
>
> (S.T.I.6.4)

It is this divine goodness which moves God to produce creatures and to communicate goodness to other things by way of likeness to Himself, claims Thomas in S.C.G.II.46.

The ways of negation and analogy are thus portrayed by Aquinas as two distinct, if related, methods of obtaining a natural knowledge of God. These noetic approaches remain juxtaposed in his account in a way not unlike what we find in Plato's Parmenides and indeed in Plotinus' account of how we can encounter the One (by 'unknowing') and the Good (by analogical knowledge). It may be said that the traces of Platonism in Aquinas' theory of negation and analogy are not sufficient to conclude that there is a distinct Platonic shape to his view of natural theological knowledge. However, these traces do indicate certain shared themes and motifs and there is also, as in S.T.I.6.4, his occasional explicit use of Platonic thought when St. Thomas needs to explain some crucial aspects of the Christian view of the divine - human relationship. However, the need for a

greater spiritual enlightenment is never far from Aquinas' mind and, despite his respect for natural reason, he was somewhat sceptical about its ability to function successfully in a theological way, given the flawed state of human nature which he as a Christian believed to exist. The intellectual clarity which he sought had to come from some external source, not only to assist the human mind to penetrate to the essence of God, but also to act as a corrective for the deficiencies of human reasoning. Because of this, Aquinas regarded the knowledge of faith as superior to natural human knowledge and as a crucial stage in the mind's ascent to God.

I.4. Faith and the Knowledge of God

I.4.1. Maimonides' Influence on Aquinas

Aquinas discovered considerable support for his scepticism about the human mind's capacity for theological truth in the views of Moses Maimonides, the Jewish thinker, whom he called Rabbi Moyses. The Thomistic position, as outlined in a number of texts (44), unashamedly follows the exact line taken by Maimonides to whom Aquinas does not hesitate to acknowledge his debt (45). Maimonides' views are contained in his Guide of the Perplexed Book I, Chs.31-35 during

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(44) Super De Trin.3.1, De Veritate 14.10, S.C.G.I.4, S.T.I.1.1 & S.T.II-II.2.4.

(45) Super De Trin.3.1 & De Ver.14.10.

which he acknowledges his own debt to Alexander of Aphrodisias from whom he claims to have borrowed his ideas. In Chapter 31, he describes three impediments to the truth which Alexander has identified. The first is the love of domination and strife, secondly, the obscurity of the truth and the difficulty of understanding it and finally, the ignorance of people and their inability to comprehend. Maimonides' account develops these points to which he adds a further category of his own. This concerns the influence of habit and upbringing which accustoms people to accept and defend certain opinions and to reject others. Maimonides concludes that theological subjects should not be studied except by mature students who are suitably disposed in mind and body for this kind of investigation (G.P.I.33). He believes that young people, in particular, are unable for such study either intellectually or temperamentally. Maimonides illustrates his claim with the example of an infant who is given bread, meat and wine and cannot digest them as an adult can. Likewise, theological truth cannot be digested by most people, he thinks, since they need to have such truth formulated in metaphorical language (46). Only the more intelligent, who are more proficient in applying demonstrative procedures, will thereby come to understand

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(46) Cf. Aquinas on metaphorical language in Super De Trin.2.4.

the essence of these truths.

Students must develop the correct disposition for such tuition by first attaining knowledge of the sciences from which the premisses of speculation are derived. They must be "full of understanding, intelligent, sagacious by nature" and capable of very quickly working out solutions even from quite scanty and transitory clues (G.P.I.33). As Maimonides sees it, the study of God, in terms of a disciplined enquiry, is extremely demanding both in terms of its subject matter and as regards the high standard of personal and intellectual qualities that are required by the student.

Maimonides develops in some detail the points already made and warns us, for example, that the difficulty, subtlety and obscurity of the content of truth can put us at risk. He illustrates his point with the analogy of a swimmer who knows how to bring up pearls from the depths of the sea compared with someone who is unable to do so and who may drown as a result. In the same way, he argues, that, just as only those trained to swim should expose themselves to the risks of swimming, people who seek a profound level of knowledge must undergo considerable training or otherwise they get lost. Another obstacle to the truth is the human mind's insufficiency which is there from the very start. Maimonides suggests that the capacity of the mind for knowledge may never be fully realised because of the difficulty of obtaining sufficient mental training to

achieve this purpose. He maintains that there are numerous obstacles and many distractions in the way of achieving mental perfection. Maimonides also provides a list of the kind of preparatory studies that are necessary in order to become suitably disposed to understand divine things. These include, among others, astronomy, general cosmology and psychology. He also astutely observes that although people say they desire such knowledge, they want it without having to make any effort and are not prepared to spend much time undertaking the necessary studies. The inter - relationship of the divine effects means that in knowing about them, we learn something about their divine agent, which is the point of undertaking these studies. This view is also reflected in Aquinas' view of the sciences. Maimonides claims that other speculative disciplines, even if they are not directly relevant to theology, can train the mind in how to draw correct theological inferences and eliminate confused thinking. Examples of such disciplines include logic, mathematics and the natural sciences. However, we must not stop short at these but rather see them as leading on to the divine science of theology. Maimonides concludes that if there were no traditional authority for teaching divine truth through parables, most people would die without knowing whether or not there was a God, much less anything about Him. Very few would consequently attain theological knowledge by themselves.

The daunting programme of intellectual training envisaged by Maimonides echoes to some extent Plato's plan for education in The Republic. Like Plato, Maimonides infers the need for a teaching authority to guide the general body of people towards the truth, a view also espoused by Aquinas in a Christian context. Maimonides claims too that the standard of excellence required for theological studies is subjectively linked with the level of personal commitment in time and energy. The latter is lacking, he thinks, in most people, who wish to avoid the preliminary studies necessary or do not regard them as being theologically required or find them incomprehensible. There is the additional factor of laziness. People may even come to think that such studies are either harmful or useless.

Maimonides also considers the various natural aptitudes that people have and claims that to achieve perfect rationality, one must be thoroughly trained in how to behave morally and "be endowed with the qualities of tranquillity and quiet" (G.P.I.34). Many people, however, are temperamentally incapable of this because they are unable to manage their impulses and emotional life. This is particularly so with the very young. People are also preoccupied with bodily necessities and family responsibilities. If, added to this, they are more interested in the superficial things of life or are accustomed to a way of life that is bad, then the difficulty

of seeking the truth about God is even greater. Even the most perfect human being who becomes pre - occupied with what is necessary in life or develops a strong desire for unnecessary things will find that his or her theoretical interests will weaken and become submerged in other pursuits with a consequent slackening of interest in theological matters. Maimonides sums up his view on the subject by declaring that only a few solitary and very special individuals are capable of arriving at truths about God by themselves. The majority are not and, as a result, such truths must be hidden from the beginner who should be discouraged from pursuing them in the same way as a small baby should be prevented from consuming coarse foods or lifting heavy weights.

I.4.2. Aquinas on the Necessity for Faith

The case that Maimonides makes for the difficulty of humanly obtaining access to theological knowledge is accepted by Aquinas who presents the Jewish thinker's arguments more or less in the same form as they are found in The Guide of the Perplexed, as was earlier mentioned. There is, however, a slight difference of emphasis between them. This can be summed up by saying that, although Maimonides does stress the need for a teaching authority, his treatment is more concerned with simply identifying the impediments that stand in the way of naturally knowing the truth about God

through human reason. Aquinas, on the other hand, seems determined to interpret the same material much more explicitly as arguments for the necessity of knowledge by faith. This is clear from the titles of the relevant articles where the issue is discussed.

In Q.3 Art.1 of his commentary on Boethius' treatise on the Trinity, for example, Aquinas asks whether faith is necessary for human beings. His reply consists of restating the reasons given by Maimonides, even to the point of following the same order set out in The Guide of the Perplexed. Aquinas claims that faith enables us to know with certainty those divine truths which are within our natural grasp, even though we may experience difficulty with them. The depth and subtlety of these truths hide them from our natural understanding. He gives a further reason for this in De Ver.14.10 by stating that the things most distant from sensory experience are the most difficult to know and grasp initially. In S.C.G.I.4, he tells us that the truth about God is so profound that it is only after long practice (post longum exercitium) that the human mind can apprehend it.

He also concurs with Maimonides on the question of the human mind's weakness (Super De Trin.3.1). He argues that this means that the mind must be provided with divine truths for belief from the outset if one is to know God, even though, in principle, such knowledge is naturally

attainable. Aquinas also accepts the need for the kinds of preliminary studies identified by Maimonides which must precede the study of theology. These include almost all of the sceinces whose ultimate objective, according to Thomas, is the knowledge of divine reality. However, few people are able for such an academic programme which means that, if theological knowledge was not available through faith, the vast majority of people would remain ignorant of and die without knowing God (47). Aquinas also remarks on the constitutional unsuitability of many people for undertaking a rational enquiry (Super De Trin.3.1) and their general disinclination for it (De Ver.14.10). He also mentions the occupational commitments which prevent people from devoting time and energy to the pursuit of theological enquiries because they have to provide for the necessities of life (De Ver.14.10) and to look after family concerns (48). In S.C.G.I.4, he agrees with Maimonides that young minds are particularly unsuitable for engaging in theological enquiry since young people are too easliy swayed by their passions. Aquinas also thinks that many people would remain in doubt about divine truths even when these are correctly demonstrated because the force of argumentation would not persuade them especially after spending some time listening

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(47) De Ver.14.10 & S.T.II-II.2.4.

(48) S.C.G.I.4 & S.T.II-II.2.4.

to the conflicting views of other people considered to be wiser. Even the philosophers are not immune from error and disagree among themselves, Aquinas states in S.T.II-II.2.4, which again implies that, if people are to be even naturally enlightened about God in a way that is free of doubt and uncertainty, they must be provided with such knowledge by way of faith. This is because only God understands divine truth perfectly and is therefore in the best position to teach it fully to human beings (De Ver.14.10). Although Aquinas' rather sceptical view of the role of human thought in theological matters is somewhat redeemed by his view that faith merely perfects and transcends human reason and is not in conflict with it, as he remarks in De Ver.14.10 ad 9, it is clear that he regards the natural efforts of the human mind alone to reach God as being seriously deficient. This seems to conflict with what he says elsewhere with reference to learning about God through sensory experience and it represents Aquinas' conviction that only the knowledge of faith can guarantee the certainty of all natural reasoning about God.

Faith also provides us with a form of knowledge about what God is, which would otherwise elude us, according to St. Thomas. This is why he defines it as a theological virtue (49), divinely infused (S.T.II-II.6.1) and the gift

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(49) De Ver.14.3 & S.T.II-II.4.5.

of God Who is its object of knowledge. It is typically concerned with what is beyond the natural understanding of the finite mind and which is properly restricted to God alone (S.T.II-II.6.1). It is midway between opinion and understanding or science (Super De Trin.3.1). Like opinion, it is concerned with what is the subject of conjecture but also involves certain and fixed assent (habet certum et fixum assensum) and a permanent adherence to specific propositions. The human mind, however, is not wholly set at rest when one believes because the content of faith is not understood. This allows the believer to continue to engage in a discursive enquiry about its content even though the assent given is fixed and unwavering. Although faith itself cannot confer ultimate happiness, it can provide some anticipation of it by bringing about an intellectual assent to propositions that are not evident to the mind. In thus by - passing the processes of understanding and scientific enquiry, faith asserts the certainty of divine truth while protecting the latter's transcendent nature. It therefore represents a more advanced stage in the cognitive assent of the mind to God. It is now time to consider the way in which Aquinas describes this ascent in S.C.G.IV.1 where he outlines the process in terms of the thought - categories and language of Platonism.

I.5. The Cognitive Ascent to God

The aim of Summa Contra Gentiles Book IV is explicitly concerned with the role of Christian theology in relation to how we can come to know God as distinct from the preceding Books I-III which are more philosophical in outlook. Book IV Ch.1 contains the prooemium or introduction to this exercise and outlines various ways in which the human mind can ascend to God. Having stated that people have been given the means to attain this final goal, namely, to know God, Aquinas proceeds to explain the cognitive ascent as follows:

> For, since all the perfections of things come down from God the summit of all perfections, man begins from the lowest things and rising by degrees advances to the knowledge of God : thus too, in corporeal movements, the way down is the same as the way up, and they differ only as regards their beginning and end. (S.C.G.IV.1)

This two - way movement, downwards from God and upwards from creatures, contains echoes of Plato's account of the Cave Allegory. It also reflects certain themes in Plotinus' view of emanation and return (e.g. as set out in Enn.V.1.6). Plotinus claims that we exist more when we turn to the Good wherein our well - being and true life consists (Enn.VI.9.9) and he describes in Enn.V.I.1 the need for souls who have separated themselves from God, their father, to return to their true source through coming to know their true nature

and destiny. In Enn.III.8.10, Plotinus compares the productive source of all things to a spring that has no other origin, giving itself without diminishment to rivers which flow from it and which ultimately direct themselves back towards it. Later Aquinas will use a somewhat similar analogy in Scriptum Super Sententiis (50). The principles of emanation and undiminished giving by the Good are also to be found in the writings of Proclus. In his Elements of Theology, Proclus defines reversion as the process by which well - being is attained by desiring Good (Prop.31) in the context of a likeness to the term of reversion (Prop. 32), all of this occurring in terms of a causal relationship (Prop.35). Aquinas' theory of the mind's ascent to God uncannily reflects these themes in Platonic thought.

St. Thomas sets out to develop the points made in the passage quoted earlier from S.C.G.IV.1 in relation to the two ways of considering the descent of perfections from God. If we take as our point of reference the origin of things, we find, states Aquinas, a universe which consists of higher and lower entities established according to a certain order (51). However, if we consider things in themselves

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(50) Cf. Ch.3 with reference to Aquinas' boundary image.

(51) Cf. M.C. D'Arcy (ed.), Thomas Aquinas Selected Writings, p.188.

from the point of view of causality, what we find is that, since causes always rank higher than their effects, the things that are caused first, fall short of their primary cause, God, while transcending their own effects. This process holds true of all things, including those that are inferior to everything else. Thus, he concludes, that the order of descending causes has God, Who is perfect unity, at its summit, and beneath God lies the diversity and variety of other things. A consequence of this, for Aquinas, is that the further away something is from God, the less unity it has. This is based on the principle that the more something is one or unified, the greater is its power and worth :

"quanto est magis unum, tanto est magis virtuosum et dignius." (S.C.G.IV.1)

Aquinas concludes that the things which emanate from God obtain unity from their principle and multiplicity from the ends towards which they are directed.

It is impossible to read this account in S.C.G.IV.1 without being struck by its Neoplatonic character, especially when we take the general tone of many of Aquinas' other writings into consideration. Its appearance in Summa Contra Gentiles, in the form of an important schema, summarising as it does, the ways in which we can come to know God, signifies the importance of Platonism for Aquinas' theory of the cognitive ascent to God. The similarities between his account and those of Plotinus and Proclus are

evident, if we consider them briefly. Plotinus regarded the One as representing the highest kind of unity and therefore superior to the multiplicity that emanated from it (52). Similarly in Proclus' Elements of Theology, unity surpasses multiplicity (e.g. Prop.21) since every productive cause is superior to its effects (Prop.7) and all that exists proceeds from a single cause (Prop.11). Proclus also writes about a hierarchy of beings consisting of superior intelligences near the summit with purely corporeal entities at the other end (Prop.111). Aquinas admits to being familiar with this hierarchy in the course of his commentary on Prop.19 of Liber de Causis, the text of which he knew to be a summary of Proclus' Elements of Theology (53). Thomas perceives this whole hierarchical schema to consist firstly, of divinity, secondly, of separate intelligences, thirdly, of souls and fourthly, of bodies. The latter three touch each other, he claims in his commentary on de Causis, in that bodies participate in existence (esse), souls in existence and life (esse et vivere) and intellectual beings in existence, life and intelligence (esse, vivere et intelligere). This theory of a cosmological order of inter - related bodies, souls and intelligences reaching towards the

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(52) Cf. Enn.V.6.6, VI.6.3 & V.3.16.

(53) S. Thomae Aquinatis O.P., In Librum De Causis Expositio (Taurini & Romae : Marietti, 1955), p.105.

realm of divinity appears to underlie Aquinas' account in S.C.G.IV.1.

After concluding his thoughts on unity and multiplicity in the latter text, Aquinas claims that corresponding to the diversity of things originating from one principle, there are a multiplicity of ways in which we can come to know God. He then mentions the familiar difficulty, to which reference has been made here earlier, that, though in principle, the human mind can ascend to God in a multiplicity of ways, its weakness prevents it from knowing perfectly what these ways are. Aquinas develops this point in a rather sceptical manner reminiscent of John Locke, by remarking that, because our knowledge begins from sensory experience which is directed towards external sensory qualities (exteriora accidentia) like colour and smell, the mind is barely capable of penetrating through these exterior qualities to what lies within even as regards the things whose accidentia it apprehends perfectly through the senses. This seems, indeed, a rather strange observation for Aquinas to make, since he generally held, in line with Aristotle, that the the human mind could usually penetrate to the essences of things. In S.C.G.IV.1, on the contrary, he appears to be suggesting that the mind somehow stops short at the external sensoria. One might ask then how it can have essential knowledge of anything, if this is the case. An alternative way of explaining such scepticism on the part

of Aquinas is to see it as a form of selective argumentation which allows him to make a strong case for divine revelation, which indeed is one of the objectives of Chapter 1 and is central to Book IV as a whole. His sceptical view of human cognition is further continued in his observation that, since it is difficult for the mind to understand the nature of the things that have accidental qualities capable of being grasped by the senses, it must be even more difficult to understand the nature of things whose accidents cannot be grasped at all, even though we may be able, in part, to obtain some knowledge of their nature from their effects. It is difficult to know precisely what Aquinas has in mind here though it may be that he was thinking of separate intelligences, in whose existence he believed, and who, according to the cosmological view of his time, were thought to be involved in planetary movement. Aquinas sceptically adds that even if the very natures of things were known to us, their divinely instituted order with its network of relationships and teleology would not be known since we cannot comprehend the purpose of divine providence. He concludes rather rhetorically by demanding how, if these ways of cognising God are so imperfectly known to us, they could possibly serve as a means of obtaining perfect theological knowledge. He finally suggests that even if we knew these ways to God perfectly, we should still fail to obtain a knowledge of our divine principle by virtue of

divine transcendence.

Having marshalled this array of arguments designed to point out the serious, if not insuperable, difficulties in the way of the natural efforts of the human mind to know God, Aquinas is now in a position to justify the need for divine revelation. To provide human beings with some definite theological knowledge, God out of a superabundant goodness, claims Aquinas, revealed certain things about divine life, which, in the natural course of things, would not be accessible to the human mind. He adds that this revealed knowledge also follows a certain pattern by progressively moving from what is imperfect to perfect. What Aquinas seems to have in mind is the relationship between revelation by faith and the knowledge of beatitude. The former is imperfect since divine truths are revealed to human beings in a way which they do not understand. Instead people accept such truths by believing what they hear. However, at this stage, the mind is still joined (connexus) in present life to sensory things and is unable to elevate itself to contemplate what transcends the senses out of all proportion. However, the freedom from sensory things will allow the intellect to be raised up to look upon the things that are divinely revealed.

It is in keeping with the general Platonic tone of this chapter that the senses are identified as obstacles to the full knowledge of divine truths, a view put forward, for

example, in Phaedo 65E-67D. The metaphor of visualising the truth about God is also originally to be found in Plato and in the writings of followers like Plotinus (54), though, of course, it exists in the works of Aristotle too. Aquinas summarises his view of the mind's ascent to God in S.C.G.IV.1 by concluding that there are three ways of coming to know God : first, by way of natural reason, secondly, by way of hearing God's natural revelation through faith and thirdly, by the perfect revelation where the human mind sees God in the beatific vision.

The Thomistic account of the cognitive ascent to God thus contains the view that theological knowledge can be attained by the mind acting in conjunction with the sensory powers up until the point of death (except in the case of rapture, which will be discussed in Chapter 4) and independently of them in the post - mortem beatific vision. The limitations of the former knowledge are emphasised in Aquinas' scepticism concerning the extent to which even the sensory - based knowledge of God is possible in the absence of faith and in his claim that even faith itself is imperfect compared with the clarity of the beatific vision.

It is now time to examine the epistemological contrasts evident in Aquinas' theory of how the mind comes to know God. Since he believes that the sensory - based knowledge of

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(54) Enn.IV.8.1, V.1.2, V.5.7, 8 & V.3.5.

God must be ultimately superseded by the non - sensory knowledge of beatitude, it is important to ascertain how the latter is epistemologically portrayed and justified. In view of the fact that he also thought that the sensory - based knowledge of God was epistemologically derived from his interpretation of Aristotle, it will be interesting to examine Aquinas' explanation of how human beings can have knowledge independently of the senses and of the body. A question arises too with regards to the coherence of a Thomistic theory which holds two apparently conflicting epistemologies side by side. There are further questions as well for Aquinas' model of the kind of psychological human constitution which would support such a dual structure of cognition. These issues will be examined in the following chapters.

Chapter 2

Knowledge, the Soul and the Body

2.1. The Problem

An analysis of Aquinas' theory of how we can come to know God presents difficulties in terms of his understanding of Aristotle with whom he claims to share the view that human knowledge is derived from sensory experience. The latter means that the human mind functions in conjunction with the senses and the imagination in the cognition of reality (S.T.I.12.4). However, Aquinas states that God transcends all images (S.T.I.12.2) and is not found in matter, which means that the human intellect is not naturally capable of knowing God's essence. He also claims that God is too powerful and transcendent an intelligible object to be known by any finite mind, human or otherwise (S.T.I.12.4). To try to know what God is, according to Aquinas, is like a bat trying to see the light of the sun (S.T.I.12.1). By contrast, the sensory - based knowledge of God is limited to what we can know about the fact that God exists, which includes the knowledge of negation and analogy. This, however, cannot reveal God's nature to us. Aquinas is very insistent that no created mind can know what God is (S.C.G.III.52) and this applies particularly to the human mind since soul and matter, sense

and intellect, are always intertwined in human life at present :

> But our soul, as long as we live in this life, has its being in corporeal matter ; hence naturally it knows only what has a form in matter, or what can be known by such a form.
>
> (S.T.I.12.11)

This insistence on the indispensibility of sense experience in life before death is typically expressed in S.T.I.Q.84. He argues here that no human mind could understand bodily things through its own essence (Art.2) nor could innately contain the forms or species of things (Art.3). Neither could it derive knowledge from separate forms, a view which he attributes to Plato (Art.4) nor obtain knowledge from eternal archetypes (Art.5). Instead, knowledge is abstracted from sensory data (Art.6) and occurs in conjunction with sensory images (Art.7). Aquinas adds that it is not possible for the mind to form a perfect judgement if the senses are suspended since it is through them that knowledge is mediated (Art.8). This last claim would appear to contradict what he writes elsewhere about rapture where knowledge is said to occur independently of the senses (1). It also does not quite fit with claims made elsewhere by Aquinas that the senses can cloud one's judgement and can even interfere with

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(1) Cf. Chapter 4.

one's ability to be certain of reaching a conclusion, for example, in theological matters (2). However, in S.T.I.Q.84, it is clear that Aquinas is quite consciously following his understanding of Aristotelian teaching by declaring that the senses and the imagination are indispensible for human knowledge.

Despite this insistence on sensory - based knowledge, Aquinas perceives it as being restricted to this life (S.T.I.12.11) after which he claims that another kind of knowledge then becomes available. This is what he writes in S.C.G.II.81 :

> Wherefore when it shall be wholly separated from the body, it will be perfectly likened to separate substances as to the manner of understanding and will receive their influence abundantly. Accordingly, though our act of understanding as regards its mode in present life ceases when the body perishes, another and higher mode of understanding takes its place.

The separate substances in question are the angelic intelligences and what Aquinas seems to be suggesting in this Neoplatonically - inspired passage is that the human soul in separation from the body will become capable of a rather similar form of cognition and will be intellectually

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(1) e.g. S.C.G.I.4. Cf. also Chapter I, Section 1.4.2.

influenced by these intelligences. He explains in S.T.I.89.1 ad 3 that such post - mortem non - sensory cognition is not the result of any innate intuitive power that the soul may have nor does it occur by a process of abstraction from sensory data since the senses and the imagination are no longer present after death. Instead, Aquinas concludes, the human mind attains knowledge after death by means of a divine enlightenment made available to the soul which already occurs in the case of the superior intelligences. This also means that when the human mind no longer has sensory images available to it, it can then attend to the higher realities.

The kind of knowledge obtained in this state is described in S.T.I.89.Arts.2-8 (3). It includes the ability to know other separated souls and to have some knowledge of the angelic intelligences (A.2). Aquinas claims that the soul knows natural things (A.3) and is not impeded in its knowledge by local distance (A.7). However, it is unaware of what goes on on earth because the soul's mode of existence differs from its embodied way of being before death (A.8). Aquinas also appears to make a distinction between this

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(3) Cf. also Patrick Quinn, "The Relationship between Human Transcendence and Death in the Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas", Milltown Studies, No.25, Spring 1990, pp.63-75 (here, p.70).

category of non - sensory knowledge and the beatific vision. In the latter case, according to S.C.G.III.53, the mind is supernaturally elevated by being divinely infused with a sublime disposition to know God's likeness. This makes the divine essence visible to the human mind and the process occurs independently of any sensory input.

When the latter view is set side by side with his theory of how knowledge is obtained by means of sensory experience, it is clear that Aquinas' position contains two different epistemologies (4). On the one hand, there is his view that the human mind before death functions in conjunction with sensory experiences whereas, on the other hand, Aquinas maintains that it can operate independently of all sensory input in the post - mortem state of knowledge. Added to this is his assumption that, in the latter case, there is greater noetic clarity and the most sublime form of knowledge available to the human mind, namely, the knowledge of God's essence. Only one of these epistemological accounts, the former, can be explained by Aquinas in the light of his understanding of Aristotle. Otherwise, although he does not explicitly say so, Aquinas' attempts to explain non - sensory knowledge are

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(4) Cf. also Patrick Quinn, "Aquinas' Concept of the Body and Out of Body Situations", The Heythrop Journal, October 1993, Vol.34, No.4, pp.387-400, (here, pp.388-389).

quite clearly similar to what is said in the tradition of Platonism. Aquinas' most effective image for why and how these two diverse forms of knowledge are possible is depicted in his Neoplatonic boundary image of the soul described in Chapter 3. This, as will be shown, is quite consciously adopted from the summary of Proclus' writings available to Aquinas in Liber de Causis.

The Thomistic case for the necessity of having access to the non - sensory and beatific knowledge of God is based on the view that there is a fundamental human desire to know the essences of things (S.T.I-II.3.8). By applying this principle to theological knowledge, Aquinas can claim that we cannot remain content with any other form of theological knowledge apart from the knowledge of God's essence (S.C.G.III.39). Another aspect of this claim is that when we come to see the divine essence, ultimate human happiness will be achieved (5). Aquinas contends that since God is the ultimate end of all creatures, intelligent beings can only be satisfied by contemplating God (S.C.G.III.37). Such contemplation requires tranquillity both internal and external which comes about through freedom from the turbulence of the passions and from social strife. These conditions enable one to contemplate divine reality in which wisdom and ultimate happiness are to be found. Aquinas

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(5) S.C.G.III.Chs.25-63 & S.T.I-II.QQs.1-5.

typically observes in S.C.G.III.48 that this knowledge of the divine essence cannot be found in this life but only in the post - mortem state. He addresses the same issue in S.T.I.12.1 where he claims that, since ultimate human happiness is related to noetic activity, the human mind must somehow be able to see God. If this were not so, our final happiness would not be attainable and our natural desire for it would be in vain. Alternatively, it would consist in something other than God, a possibility which Aquinas will not allow on the grounds of faith. Commenting on this desire for God, O'Mahony writes :

> By its transcendental relationship to being mind has a certain 'immediacy' where God is concerned. Analogically, He is contained in its adequate object, being. (6)

This natural aspiration towards a supernatural goal, however, leads Aquinas to the classic paradox identified by Bernard Lonergan in the following passage :

> There exists a natural desire to understand. Its range is set by the adequate object of intellect. Its proper fulfilment is obtained by the reception of a form proportionate to the object understood. This natural desire extends to understanding God.

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(5) James E. O'Mahony, The Desire of God (London & Cork : Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd. and Cork University Press, 1929), p.242.

In that case its fulfilment is the beatific vision. Still, only the theologian can affirm a natural desire to see God ; a philosopher has to be content with paradox." (7)

It is this dilemma which gives rise to the need for the two epistemologies contained in the Thomistic account. If he were to be completely faithful to his understanding of Aristotle's teaching, Aquinas' Christian belief in beatific happiness after death and in the human soul's immortality could not be theoretically justified and the human mind's non - sensory based knowledge of God could not be explained. He was no doubt led as a result, whether consciously or not, to explain this phenomenon in the light of a philosophical tradition which could do so, i.e. the tradition of Platonism. The fact that he is slow to admit this is interesting and gives rise to certain questions. Was he aware, for instance, of the full implications of his theory that the soul could noetically function when separated from the body ? Did he, alternatively, refuse to allow himself to think, out of deference to Aristotle, that his theory may have been Platonically inspired ? Or was he, perhaps, trying to have it both ways by using Aristotelianism or Platonism when it suited his theological programme ? The latter would

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(7) F.E. Crowe S.J. (ed.), Bernard Lonergan S.J., Collection (Montreal : Palm Publishers, 1967), p.87.

indeed leave him open to Russell's charge of virtual philosophic dishonesty (8).

It is difficult to answer these questions except to say that, in Aquinas' intellectual make - up, there must have been inevitable traces of Platonism, as was mentioned in the last chapter. One of the sources of this influence may well have been Albert (9) but Aquinas' Platonism was also likely to have been absorbed from the general intellectual climate of his time. His interest in the writings of Pseudo - Dionysius, his commentary on Liber de Causis which contained a summary of Proclus' thought and the influence of Islamic philosophers like Avicenna and Averroes, whose views were shaped by Islamic Neo - Platonism, are some of the factors which contributed to Aquinas' intellectual formation. There is evidence in S.T.I.89.1 to suggest that St. Thomas struggled with the tension arising from the co - existence of the two epistemologies in his account which he tried to resolve in Article 1, if without great success. It may have been that there was some confusion in Aquinas' mind about the precise origins of his theory of how the human intellect can understand, independently of the senses

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(8) Bertrand Russell, History of Western Philosophy (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1946), pp.453-454.

(9) Frederick Copleston S.J., A History of Philosophy Vol. 2 (London : Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1950), pp.293-301.

and that he only gradually became aware of the extent of the problem in a text such as S.T.I.89.1. In this passage, Gilson identifies the basis of the dilemma which Christian theologians like Aquinas had to confront :

> On the one hand, a theologian had to conceive man as endowed with a personal immortal soul ... On the other hand, the Christian belief in the resurrection made it necessary for the same theologians to attribute to human nature as a whole, and not only to the human soul, a substantial unity of its own.
>
> It was not easy to find a solution that met these two requirements : a soul free enough from its body to be able to survive it, a body so intimately associated with the soul that it could share in its immortality. (10)

Gilson adds that, although by following Plato, one could explain the soul's immortality, the disadvantage was that the substantial unity of body and soul might then be questioned and result in the inability to perceive the point of bodily resurrection. Following Aristotle, on the other hand, would mean that, while one could respect the

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(10) Etienne Gilson, The Elements of Christian Philosophy (New York : Doubleday and Company Inc., 1960), p.222.

integrity of soul - body unity, it was difficult to explain the soul's immortality. This problem lies at the root of much of what Aquinas wants to say about human unity and personal immortality and it also underlies the difficulties in relation to his epistemological views. Such factors made it hard for him to account satisfactorily for the phenomenon of the same mind being able to attain knowledge both in conjunction with and independently of the senses. His strange reply in S.T.I.89.1 to the question of whether the soul can understand anything after death emphasises his dilemma. Throughout the article, Aquinas reminds us of how it is more natural for human knowledge to occur through sensory experience while simultaneously voicing his approval of the sublime nature of non - sensory cognition. At one point, he enquires as to why God could not have made the latter naturally possible for the human mind but immediately follows this with a recognition of the difficulties that would then arise as regards seeking a meaningful role for the body. The article, in fact, runs its course without providing any detailed answer as to how the mind can think without the senses. It is also evident, as will be seen later, that Aquinas experienced problems in how to perceive the body's role in the resurrection. Although he writes about the resurrected body as a spiritualised one that is perfectly attuned to the beatified soul's orientation to God, his view leaves a number of questions unanswered. This

can be seen in the rather awkward solutions found in texts such as S.T.I-II.4.5 & 6 which claim, in effect, that, though perfect happiness is intellectual in nature, the body must retain importance if beatitude is to be perfect and complete in every way.

Divine illumination is another aspect of this issue. This is the means mentioned earlier by which the mind becomes receptive to the non - sensory supernatural vision of God's essence (11). The unique status of the human soul which makes it capable of receiving this divine disposition is originally signified by its special creation by God (S.C.G.II.87). Plato, too, ascribed a divine quality to the soul (12) as did his disciple Plotinus who also identified its locus as divine (Enn.IV.8.1). In S.C.G.II.87, Aquinas explains the teleology of the soul's ascent in terms of its affinity for God :

> The end of a thing corresponds to its principle : for a thing is perfect when it attains its proper principle, whether by likeness or in any way whatsoever. Now the end and ultimate perfection of the human soul is to soar above the whole order of creatures and to reach the First Principle, which

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(11) S.C.G.III.53, S.T.I.12.5, 98.1 ad 3.

(12) Phaedo 80AB, Laws 726A.

is God. Therefore the proper principle of the soul's origin is God.

Aquinas' attempts to depict the human soul both as being capable of independent cognitive existence and as the form of the human body result in his trying to steer a path between defending the soul's subsistence while also insisting on the importance of its unity with the body :

> The soul communicates that existence in which it subsists to the corporeal matter, out of which and the intellectual soul there results unity of existence ; so that the existence of the whole composite is also the existence of the soul. This is not the case with other non - subsistent forms. For this reason the human soul retains its own existence after the dissolution of the body; whereas it is not so with other forms.
>
> (S.T.I.76.1 ad 5)

He describes the implications of the subsistent soul's power to function intellectually as follows :

> Therefore the intellectual principle which we call the mind or the intellect (quod dicitur mens, vel intellectum) has an operation per se apart from the body. Now only that which subsists can have an operation per se. For nothing can operate but what is actual : wherefore a thing operates according as it is ; for which reason we do not

> say that heat imparts heat, but that what is hot gives heat. We must conclude, therefore, that the human soul, which is called the intellect or the mind, is something incorporeal and subsistent.
>
> (S.T.I.75.2)

Both of these passages are typical of Aquinas' analysis of the soul's relationship with the body which he sees noetically expressed in the mind's relationship with the senses before death and in its independence from them afterwards. The sentiments represented here suggest the subtle balance which Thomas wants to achieve in his account of the soul - body relationship and the role of the human mind in relation to the sensory powers. It is a difficult position which Aquinas is trying to hold and is perhaps most effectively depicted in a metaphorical way in the boundary formula of the soul which is derived from the Neoplatonic tradition and is described in Chapter 3.

2.2. Aquinas, Platonism, Avicenna and the Soul

Aquinas' account of the soul and its knowledge thus clearly differs in part from that of Aristotle who did not regard the human soul as subsistent or capable of functioning intellectually independently of the senses after death. The difficulties that St. Thomas had to confront seem also to have been encountered by his tutor, Albertus Magnus, who is reputed to have said :

"When I consider the soul in itself, I agree with Plato ; but when I consider it with respect to the form of life which it gives the body, I agree with Aristotle." (13) This statement admirably captures the dilemma of the Christian theologian mentioned earlier by Gilson. Albert was also engaged in a struggle to reconcile how the soul could transcend matter in its intellectual activity and be immortal while yet being the rational form of individual human life (14). He was very interested, too, in Neoplatonic and Islamic philosophy, which undoubtedly shaped his understanding of the human soul. Like Albert his mentor, Aquinas' concept of the soul seems to have been influenced by similar forces, as was earlier mentioned, including the views of the Islamic philosopher Avicenna with whom St. Thomas shared a number of views concerning the soul's subsistent nature and its relationship with the body (15).

Like his Islamic predecessors and contemporaries,

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(13) James H. Robb (trans. with introd.), St. Thomas Aquinas O.P. Questions on the Soul (Milwaukee : Marquette University Press, 1984), p.19.

(14) Frederick Copleston S.J., A History of Philosophy Vol 2 pp.298-299.

(15) Cf. Soheil F. Afnan, Avicenna (London : George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1958), pp.275-277.

Avicenna's own Aristotelian heritage did not wholly contain the authentic teaching of Aristotle. This was because the Islamic intellectual tradition had accepted the apocryphal Theology of Aristotle as an authentic Aristotelian work and also the text that eventually became known in medieval times as Liber de Causis. The former was actually a summary of Plotinus' Enneads Books IV-VI and therefore presented a predominantly Plotinian view of the soul under the guise of being an Aristotelian doctrine (16). Wallis has indicated the kind of confusion which must have arisen as a result as, for example, in one passage of The Theology of Aristotle which actually refutes Aristotle's own authentic doctrine of the soul and ascribes it to "the materialists" (17). Plotinus' blend of Plato and Aristotle resulted in a concept of the soul as a subsistent, immaterial, intelligent substance which was the form of the body. Knowledge could then be depicted on two levels, as in Enn.IV.8.1 : attained on a lower level by a discursive process mediated through sense experience and on a higher level, independently of the senses, by a direct cognition of intelligible reality.

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(16) Etienne Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages (London : Sheed and Ward Ltd., 1955), pp.181 - 182 ; R.T. Wallis, Neoplatonism (London : Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1972), p.163 et seq.

(17) R.T. Wallis, Neoplatonism, p.163.

The Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation from the One and the Good through intelligence to soul and from thence to the world of particulars together with the view that the soul ascended, after the body's dissolution by death, to the intelligible world inhabited by the intelligences would have been reflected in The Theology of Aristotle and influenced Avicenna's views. Indeed, the theme of emanation is suggested at times in Aquinas' own writings, notably in S.C.G.IV.1 which describes the descent of perfections from and the cognitive ascent to God. It is in terms of this kind of philosophical influence that Aquinas may have come to regard the soul as an immaterial intelligent substance existing independently in its own right while also constituting the body's substantial form.

Some of the features which Avicenna and Aquinas share in their psychological theories include the notion that the human soul is the form and perfection of the body and a unitary substance, that the soul is incorporeal and independently subsists with the intellectual power to abstract intelligibility from sense - experience (18). For Avicenna, the rational soul functions at the level of practical and theoretical intelligence, the former moving

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(18) I am indebted to F. Rahman (trans.), Avicenna's Psychology (London : Oxford University Press, 1952) for the summary here on pp.103-105 of Avicenna's views on the soul.

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to use it, to control it, and to be attracted by it." (22) Avicenna is also convinced that the soul, after separation from the body, has an individual existence. It is immortal, indestructible and wholly incorruptible since the soul is immaterial and simple, unlike a composite substance (23). Many of these features are also found in Aquinas' account of the human soul.

2.3. The Soul as an Intelligent Substance

There is a sense in which it might be said, as was previously suggested, that Aquinas might have preferred if the soul could have naturally functioned in a cognitive way independently of the senses. One gets this impression from his frequent complaints about the disadvantages that are imposed on the human mind by having to depend on sensory data and having to reason discursively and with difficulty while in this state. Aquinas contrasts this slower form of cognition with that of the superior intelligences, such as the angels, who can immediately apprehend intelligible reality and in S.T.I.89.1 he seems to suggest that these superior minds constitute the model for how to think best. However, because he also valued the importance of the human body, Aquinas is careful to qualify his respect for this

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(22) Rahman notes that this is also a feature of Plotinian thought. Cf. Avicenna's Psychology, p.107.

(23) F. Rahman (trans.), Avicenna's Psychology, p.58 et seq.

kind of thinking by insisting on the human advantages that accrue from sensory - based cognition. One such advantage is that human beings constitute a micro - universe by having the ability to share in bodiliness and intelligibility. There is also the flexibility of choice available to us if we wish to change our minds for the better in relation to the moral choices that we desire to make (24). Human beings are not fixated like the superior intelligences, according to Aquinas, and this allows the human mind considerable freedom of choice to reverse morally bad decisions right up to the point of death which is a facility lacking in the angelic intellect. Most fundamental of all, as he argues in the rather tortured text of S.T.I.89.1, it is natural for human beings to think by using the senses. This latter conclusion is derived from Aquinas' Aristotelianism and leads to the problems that emerge in the text concerning the way in which human cognition occurs after death.

The context in which St. Thomas outlines his theory of the human soul and its relationship with the body in Summa Contra Gentiles Book II is very much in terms of the soul being defined as an intelligent substance, if an inferior one, as compared with its superior angelic counterparts because of its discursive reasoning. In S.T.I.75.2 during a similar discussion, Aquinas substitutes the phrase,

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(24) S.C.G.IV.55 & 92.

intellectual principle (principium intellectuale), for intellectual substance (substantia intellectualis) which he uses in Book II of Summa Contra Gentiles. The difference is subtle but significant and may suggest a development in his understanding of the soul and of the human mind. This might be summed up by saying that whereas in Summa Contra Gentiles his emphasis is on the soul almost exclusively as a subsistent independent intelligence, in Summa Theologica he is more careful to stress the soul's incompleteness when separated from the body because of the natural and substantial union between them, resulting in the mind's dependence on the senses (25). This emphasis is particularly evident in S.T.I.89.1 which makes for the critical discussion that reveals the difficulties of maintaining the latter point of view while still insisting on the possibility of non - sensory cognition. Aquinas does suggest elsewhere, however, as in S.C.G.IV.79 that it is somehow unnatural for the soul to be separated from the body, especially if this were to be permanent. It has a potential relationship to the body, Aquinas insists in S.C.G.IV.81, and this is activated in bodily resurrection,

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(25) Anton Pegis, "The Separated Soul and its Nature in St. Thomas" in Armand Maurer (ed.), St. Thomas Aquinas 1274-1294 Commemorative Studies Vol 1 (Toronto : Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), pp.131-158.

in which Christians believe. However, it is also clear that Aquinas needs to conceive of the soul as some kind of subsisting intelligence if he wishes to defend its ability to continue to function cognitively without the body and hence his analysis of the qualities of separate intelligences in Summa Contra Gentiles.

Aquinas' belief in the existence of angelic intelligences may seem somewhat out of place today but was not unusual in the cosmological and religious thinking of his time (26). There are earlier references by the Platonic Socrates to the related concept of daimon and Plotinus writes about guardian spirits in Enn.III.4. Angels are also mentioned in Jewish thought (27) and Maimonides discusses them in the context of dreams and prophecies in The Guide of the Perplexed (28). Avicenna considered an angel to be "a

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(26) S.C.G.II.68 & 92-101 ; S.T.I. QQ.50-64 & 106-114 ; Mary C. Fitzpatrick & John J. Wellmuth (trans.), St. Thomas Aquinas On Spiritual Creatures (Milwaukee, Wisconsin : Marquette University Press, 1969) ; Rev. J. Lescoe (trans.), St. Thomas Aquinas Treatise On Separate Substances (West Hartford, Connecticut : Saint Joseph College, 1959).

(27) Colette Sirat, A History of Jewish Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.49-50 and p.151.

(28) Cf. The Guide of the Perplexed, Book II, Chs. 41 & 42.

pure substance endowed with life and reason, intellectual, immortal" (29) and he conceived of angelic beings as intermediaries between the Creator and terrestrial bodies.

It is not our concern here to investigate whether or not such beliefs are true but rather to examine how Aquinas applied his understanding of these independent intelligent substances to his theory of the soul in Book II of Summa Contra Gentiles. St. Thomas begins his analysis of the soul and its relationship to the body in this text by enquiring into the nature of intelligent substances in S.C.G.II.47 and in subsequent chapters until he reaches Ch.56 where he asks how such a substance can be related to the body. This will also lead him to certain conclusions about why the human mind can function independently of the senses, as is clear from S.C.G.II.81 and other texts (30). Aquinas' approach to these issues also assumes a hierarchy of beings in which superior intelligences reside near the summit and purely bodily beings below while human beings are in between both (31). This notion, which is Neoplatonic in origin and found in the writings of Proclus and Dionysius, is assumed in such texts as S.C.G.2.46. Here, Aquinas concludes that intelligent creatures are the result of a divine plan which

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(29) Soheil M. Afnan, Avicenna, p.185.

(30) Cf. Aquinas' boundary image of the soul in Chapter 3.

(31) e.g. S.C.G.II.68.

is designed to allocate to each entity the best kind of perfection possible for it. The purpose of making certain creatures intelligent, Aquinas thinks, is to ensure that they occupy the highest point in the universe. This belief in the supremacy of intellect is a feature of the Thomistic writings and typically emerges in the conclusion that our relationship with God is primarily directed by intelligence. This is linked with Aquinas' claim that the primary likeness between intelligent beings and God is intellectual (32) which teleologically attracts intelligent creatures towards their source of intelligence (S.C.G.II.46). This view is also found in Platonism, particularly in Plotinus (33). It is also interesting that Aquinas should see fit to use the Platonic image of the circle (34) to describe the attraction of things to God :

> For then is an effect most perfect when it returns to its source ; wherefore of all figures the circle, and of all movements the circular, are the most perfect, because in them a return is made to the beginning. (S.C.G.II.46)

This process of reversion represents for intelligent beings the highest point of their development since they reflect,

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(32) S.T.I.93.3 & 4.

(33) Cf. Enn.IV.8.4 & V.I.1.

(34) e.g. Cf. Plotinus on this in Enn.VI.9.8 & II.2.2.

though in a finite way, the perfection of the divine mind that is permanently drawn towards its own divine being.

Having discussed the excellence of intelligent life, Aquinas outlines in S.C.G.II.47 and in the chapters that follow, the attributes of an intelligent substance. These are free will, incorporeality, being formally immaterial, subsistent and simple. This simplicity differs from God's since essence and existence are not identical. Instead, the capacity of this intelligent essence to exist (since it is contingent) means that the relationship is one of potency to act (S.C.G.II.Chs.52 & 53) whereas God's essence necessarily exists and is identical with the divine act of existing. Finally, there is the quality of incorruptibility since a purely intellectual being has no matter (S.C.G.II.55). All these attributes also apply in some way to the human soul.

Aquinas' enquiry then shifts direction by setting out to examine in S.C.G.II.56 how an intelligent substance can be the form of the body. He rejects the possibility of a mixture between the two since this would imply some common matter between them as a medium of contact. Aquinas instead maintains that non - material beings cannot mix with what is corporeal. He concludes by defining the relationship as virtual (tactus virtutis) and illustrates this by the example of someone who touches us by making us sorrowful. Although his example is vivid, it does not really tell us much about the kind of relationship which links soul and

body. Aquinas merely accounts for this by maintaining that an intelligent substance can act on the whole body, not just at certain points, and that this relationship involves interior activity. He claims that it reaches "inwards (and) makes the touching substance to be within the thing touched, and to penetrate it without hindrance" (S.C.G.II.56). The resulting unity is described by Aquinas as composite, logical and characteristic of the relationship between substantial form and matter.

One of the difficulties that arises when Aquinas writes about the relationship between soul and body is that he sometimes seems to be describing two distinct entities. This undoubtedly results from his desire to indicate the soul's subsistent status and also from the kind of language that is unavoidable when formulating this relationship between the formal and material principles that constitute individual human life. As a result, it is possible to get the distinct impression that Aquinas, at times, conceives of soul and body in quite a dualistic way as separate entities.

The soul - body unity in Summa Theologica is likewise depicted in terms of the soul as the intellectual principle that is formative of human bodiliness (35). Aquinas also identifies here the soul's intellectual transcendence as a non - bodily state that signifies its ability to subsist

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(35) S.T.I.QQ.75 & 76.

as an independent bodily form (S.T.I.76.1). In Aquinas' Disputed Questions on the Soul De Anima, he distances himself somewhat from the tendency to see too close a relationship between the human soul and separate intelligences. In Question 7, for example, he claims that the soul is part of the human species while each angelic intelligence constitutes a single species of its own since it is not individuated by matter like human beings (36). Despite such attempts, however, the difficulty remains of conceiving the soul as Aquinas describes it. This problem relates to how its cognitive and independent existence can be reconciled with its role as the body's substantial form which results in the unity and integrity of human existence. It is difficult to think of the soul as being independently subsistent without perceiving its union with the body as somehow secondary. Alternatively, if soul - body unity is thought of as being primary, the soul's independence cannot be asserted without qualifying this as somehow representing an incomplete state. There is a genuine problem here with any attempt to give equal weight to both aspects and this clearly emerges in Aquinas' account of cognition. In fact, Aquinas himself experienced considerable difficulty in trying to do so as is evident from his attempts to try to defend the natural tendency of the human mind to use the

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(36) Cf. also S.C.G.II.94.

senses while at same time declaring that it is only when we can think independently of them that the most sublime form of knowledge becomes possible in relation to knowing the nature of God. This problem is intrinsic to Aquinas' theory of the affinity of the soul for the body.

2.4. The Affinity of the Soul for the Body

The premiss on which this relationship is based is described in S.T.I.75.4 where St. Thomas observes that the soul only constitutes a part but not the whole of what it is to be human since the human being is "something composed of body and soul." (37). In addition to his Aristotelianism, Aquinas' Christian belief in bodily resurrection compelled him to accept this point of view as is evident from texts such as S.T.I-II.4.5 & 4.6 where he describes some of the bodily consequences of the beatific vision of the resurrection. These relate to his view of the body's ultimate importance in beatific happiness, despite the admission that the body has no essential role to play in the cognitive process of knowing God's essence since the vision of God does not require mediation by the sensory powers. Of course, it can be argued, as Aquinas does, that,

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(37) For an interesting article on this, cf. Norbert Luyten, "The Significance of the Body in Thomistic Anthropology", Philosophy Today Vol VII, No.3/4, Fall 1963, pp.175-193.

ultimate human happiness, which consists of this vision, requires full human integrity of body and soul. According to S.T.I-II.4.5, complete human well - being requires bodily beauty and perfection. In his reply to objection 4 in this article, Aquinas suggests that if the body were absent, this might hold the soul back from attending fully to the divine essence, a point which he also makes in S.T.I-II.4.6 ad 2. It is difficult to understand what is meant by these latter claims in view of the purely cognitive and non - bodily nature of the beatific vision. Although the body in this state is perfectly disposed to happiness (S.T.I-II.4.6), it is described by Aquinas as fulfilling what seems to be a purely decorative role, adding a certain charm (decor) and perfection to happiness, according to S.T.I-II.4.6 ad 1. These attempts to justify the role of the body in the beatific vision seem somewhat unconvincing in view of the essentially cognitive nature of beatific happiness. Commenting on this, Simon Tugwell observes a certain intellectual unease on Aquinas' part about the resurrection (38). Tugwell associates this unease with Aquinas' view that after death the beatified soul experiences the vision of God, which would seem to make any

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(38) Simon Tugwell O.P., Human Immortality and the Redemption of Death (London : Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990, pp.149-154.

additional element to this cognitive experience wholly superfluous. Tugwell detects, as a result, a Thomistic embarrassment about the role of the body in the beatific vision. What can be said, for sure, is that once again Aquinas displays an attitude of ambiguity towards the soul - body relationship because of his wish both to defend a model of non - sensory cognition, on the one hand, together with a determination to see a close affinity between soul and body, on the other. He even attributes this affinity to the relationship between the souls and bodies of the damned after the resurrection whose reunification he perceives to represent a perpetual state of conflict (39). He depicts this in language which, at times, is reminiscent of the description of the impure souls' punishment in Phaedo 81BE. In S.C.G.IV.89. Aquinas writes about the heavy unwieldy bodiliness that characterises the damned whose dark souls are eternally frustrated. The affinity of soul and body is more happily described in S.C.G.IV.86 :

> The soul that enjoys God will adhere to Him most completely, and will participate in His goodness in the highest degree possible. Wherefore both the body will be perfectly subject to the soul, and it will share in the soul's properties, as far as possible, in

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(39) S.C.G.IV.89 & 93.

> acuteness of sense, in the orderliness of the bodily appetite, and in the superlative perfection of its nature. For a thing is so much the more perfect in nature, as its matter is more completely subject to its form.

In this perfect relationship between beatified soul and resurrected body, there is no disharmony of any kind but a total bodily attunement to the soul's orientation to God. Aquinas provides a glowing description of the spiritualised and glorified body, filled with brightness and receptive to the overflow of beatific happiness from the soul. It moves in perfect obedience to the soul's vision of God, is impassible, wholly agile and incorruptible. It will be :

> uplifted to the properties of heavenly bodies, in brightness, impassibility, easy and unwearying movement, and in being perfected by its most perfect form. (S.C.G.IV.86)

Aquinas tells us in S.C.G.IV.84 that the resurrected body will have the same nature as before and will be palpable, made of flesh and bone. It will not be transformed into a spirit and will have a definite configuration and a sense of touch. There will, however, be differences between the resurrected body and the body as it is at present, some of which have been mentioned above in relation to the state of beatitude. The main difference is that, after the resurrection, the body remains incorruptible and permanently

related to its soul and this applies to the bodies of the beatified and to those of the damned (40). Aquinas' writings on the latter state make for depressing reading and concern the disadvantages that result from the incorruptibility of body and soul in an everlasting state of punishment.

There is also a link here with Aquinas' view of the human integrity of soul and body that obtained during the initial period of primordial innocence before original sin. It was then possible for the soul, according to S.T.I.97.1, to successfully exert total spiritual control over its body. This curbed the intrinsic tendency of the material principle of human life to bring about the kind of bodily changes and corruption which ultimately result in the dissolution of soul and body in death. The human body, claims Aquinas, was then indissoluble :

> not by reason of any intrinsic vigour of immortality, but by reason of a supernatural force given by God to the soul, whereby it was entitled to preserve the body from all corruption so long as it remained itself subject to God.
>
> (S.T.I.97.1)

This control over the body is only re - established again, although in a much more enhanced way, according to Aquinas,

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(40) S.C.G.IV.85-89.

in the beatified life of the resurrection. Some clue as to what Aquinas means by conceiving the total attunement of body and soul in the latter state may be suggested by the observations of Luyten and Pegis on human embodiment. The former claims that the body "really is in being in virtue of the spirit" (41). The same theme is suggested by Pegis in a somewhat different way in the following passage :

> Embodiment is not to be understood simply as the existence of the soul in the world of matter ; on the contrary, it is the existence of the body in the spiritual world of the soul itself. The existence, the life and the economy of the human composite derive from the nature of the soul, so that it is not strictly correct to say that in the human composite the soul is in the body ; it is more proper to say that the soul exists in the body - and in the world of matter - only because the body exists in the world of the soul. The human body is matter existing and functioning with and within the life of the intellectual soul." (42)

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(41) Norbert Luyten, " The Significance of the Body in Thomistic Anthroplogy", p.184.

(42) Anton Pegis, "Between Immortality and Death", The Monist, Vol 58, No.1 January 1974, pp.1-15, (here, p.14).

These claims that human embodiment is located in the dimension of intelligent human life may indicate something about the way in which the resurrected body can share in beatific happiness. In a revealing passage in S.T.I-II.4.6 ad 3, Aquinas appears to be putting forward just such a view as regards the participation of the resurrected body in the intelligent life of the beatified soul. The objection to which he is replying takes up a point previously made by Thomas himself in the preceeding Article 5. This states that the beatified soul should be abstracted from the body in every way in order to see God. Aquinas' reply is interesting. He agrees that "the perfect operation of the intellect requires...that the intellect be abstracted from this corruptible body which weighs upon the soul" (quod aggravat animam). However, such abstraction is unnecessary in the case of the spiritualised body which is wholly subject to the spirit :

> non autem a spirituali corpore ; quod erit totaliter spiritui subjectum. (S.T.I-II.4.6 ad 3)

This suggests not only that Aquinas' model of human bodiliness relates to the resurrected body but also argues that a unique closeness exists between body and soul that makes them almost indistinguishable from each other, as it were, in this unified state. The mind can then function freely, without interference from adverse bodily conditions or needs since these are now sublimated in a new

dimension of human integrity. By contrast, the state of the damned is represented by a heavy, unwieldy and corruptible bodily condition which makes these bodies insupportable to their souls which are intellectually averted from God (S.C.G.IV.89).

These views of Aquinas, however, do not solve the problem that he had somehow to explain, without benefit of Aristotelian theory, namely, the ability of human beings to function cognitively independently of the senses. His dilemma is again revealed in the following passage where he tries to give equal weight to the soul's intellectual independence and to its unity with the body :

> It must be observed, however, that the soul understands in a different way when separated from the body and when united to it, even when it has a different mode of existence ; because a thing acts according as it is. For although the being of the soul while united to the body, is absolute and independent of the body, nevertheless the body is the instrument as it were and the subject who receives it. (S.C.G.II.81)

An additional factor which emphasises the difficulty in Aquinas' approach to this issue concerns his various attempts to qualify his views on non - sensory cognition. This is particularly evident in S.T.I.89.1 as will be seen in the next section.

2.5. The Separated Soul and its Knowledge

The difficulty experienced by Aquinas in giving equal weight to all the aspects involved in the soul - body relationship becomes very apparent in S.T.I.89.1. This article reflects, in particular, the problem of explaining how knowledge is available to the human mind after death since the body and the senses are no longer present. The difficulty emerges in the form of a challenge by Aquinas to his own understanding of Aristotle and his subsequent approach leaves us in no doubt about the tension which he recognised in his treatment of this issue. The question posed is whether the soul has knowledge when it is separated from the body in view of the human mind's dependence on the senses. Aquinas' response is both intriguing and baffling. Instead of trying to defend the possibility that the soul can have such knowledge and then explaining how this can occur, he spends most of the article justifying how appropriate it is for the mind to obtain knowledge from sensory - based data. It is only in the last sentence of the body of the article that, almost casually, Aquinas states that "it is possible for (the soul) to exist apart from the body, and also to understand in another way." There is one further brief reference in his reply to the third objection where he claims that an influx of divine light enables the soul, when separated from the body, to obtain knowledge, like other separate substances. Apart from

these few rather cryptic remarks, the article reads as a defence of sensory - based knowledge.

In the course of the text, Aquinas admits that resolving the issue of how the soul can know anything without the senses is difficult if one maintains that there is a substantial unity between soul and body. He claims that Platonism provides a convincing solution providing that one is prepared to accept that there is merely an accidental rather than a substantial relationship between them. This kind of unity would thus allow the soul at death to revert back to its own nature since it would then be capable of understanding reality without any sense - mediation, like other separate intelligences (or angelic minds). The Platonic position as described by Aquinas is to be found in The Phaedo, for example, as in the following extract, where the soul's cognitive operations when independent of the body is described :

> But when it investigates by itself, it passes into the realm of the pure and everlasting and immortal and changeless, and being of a kindred nature, when it is once independent and free from interference, consorts with it always and strays no longer, but remains in that realm of the absolute, constant and unvariable, through contact with beings of a similar nature. (79D)

Plato goes on to make it clear that this psychic freedom from the body is a desirable state which becomes permanent and allows the soul to enter "into the presence of the good and wise God." (80D)

However, the difficulty with this, as St. Thomas observes, is that it would imply that the union between soul and body is not for the soul's good if it is true that the soul can cognitively function much better without the body. It is worth noting in passing, though, that this does remain a problem in the Thomistic account of beatitude where the mind, independently of any sensory input, is described as being given a noetic disposition for the sublime form of knowledge that occurs in the beatific vision. Indeed, in S.T.I.89.1, Aquinas questions the point of having any knowledge that is not mediated by the senses since this is clearly inferior to that which occurs when the mind remains independent of them. The answer that he gives is linked to his theory of the human intellect's inferior status as compared with that of the superior angelic intelligences. The human soul, Aquinas states, is like someone of weak intellect who needs a variety of sensory data to function effectively from a cognitive point of view. This is not necessary in the case of angelic intelligences who possess immediate intuition. The human soul, by comparison, is like an uneducated or uncultivated person who must be provided with many concrete examples from the sensory world in order

to understand. This picture of the soul as a kind of educationally retarded learner may not flatter us but it vividly reflects Aquinas' perception of the low status of the human mind in the hierarchy of intelligences. It also demonstrates that Aquinas' model for intelligence consists of a non - sensory based intellect and this is clear thoughout all of Article 1. Aquinas also proceeds to use an example which is evocative of Neoplatonism to explain the mind's human weakness from another point of view :

> every intellectual substance possesses intellective power by the influence of the Divine light, which is one and simple in its first principle, and the farther off intellectual creatures are from the first principle so much the more is the light divided and diversified, as is the case with lines radiating from the centre of a circle.
>
> (S.T.I.89.1)

The tension between Aquinas' need to defend the human mind's dependence on sensory - based knowledge, on the one hand, and his obvious interest in the advantages of a non - sensory based intelligence, on the other, is quite remarkable in Article 1. As a result, the difficulties that arise in the course of his presentation of how the human mind can obtain knowledge in the absence of the

senses become very apparent. This dilemma is also evident in S.T.I.89.2 ad 1 :

> The separated soul is, indeed, less perfect considering its nature in which it communicates with the nature of the body : but it has a greater freedom of intelligence.

This freedom results in intellectual purity, according to St. Thomas, since the mind is now no longer impeded by bodily concerns and the burden of bodiliness (43). The dilemma that is implicit in the above reply is never fully resolved by Aquinas, especially in relation to the beatific vision of the soul when separated from the body after death. Earlier in S.T.I.89.1 ad 3, the problem is expressed in relation to how the soul can come to see God in the absence of the senses. Aquinas' answer is to say that it is not unnatural for the soul to cognitively function indepedently of the senses since God is the author of the light of grace and the light of reason. This is not a convincing reply. To depict non - sensory based knowledge for human beings as "not unnatural", in view of his statements elsewhere on the mind's indispensible need for the senses, simply increases our confusion. The problem, as will be seen in subsequent chapters, takes the form of the following propositions.

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(43) The text of S.T.I.89.2 ad 1 reads : "per gravedinem, et occupationem corporis a puritate intelligentia impeditur."

Firstly, Aquinas thinks that the soul's relationship with the body before death inhibits its cognitive access to God. Secondly, he maintains that when the soul in separation from the body after death sees God's essence, there is a certain incompleteness implied because of the body's absence. Thirdly, he insists that even when soul and body are reunited in the resurrection, the senses still have no part to play in beatific knowledge. There is also some confusion, as will be seen in Chapter 5, about the body's role in other respects (such as growth and its status with respect to the spatial dimension). The combination of what these three propositions represent in the Thomistic account of the beatific vision of God with its outcome for human happiness are fundamentally reflected in the dilemma that is suggested in S.T.I.89.1.

Anton Pegis declares his astonishment at Aquinas' whole approach in S.T.I.89.1 but he explains it as a development in Aquinas' appreciation of the nature of the soul - body relationship (44). While this may be true, Article 1 more importantly signals the limitations which must have become increasingly obvious to Aquinas in relation to any possible contribution that Aristotelian thought might provide to his analysis of non - sensory

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(44) Anton Pegis, "The Separated Soul and its Nature in St. Thomas", op.cit., p.136 et seq.

cognition. It will be interesting to see how St. Thomas employed his familiarity with the Neoplatonism of Proclus, which is demonstrated in the Thomistic commentary on Liber de Causis, to try to overcome his dilemma. However, when we reflect on his analysis in S.T.I.89.1, it is difficult not to be impressed by the extent of the problems that are revealed there in relation to how the mind can think without the body. Having said this, however, Aquinas' boundary image is a seductive one as regards the way in which it portrays how the human mind can function both in conjunction with and independently of the senses.

Chapter 3

Aquinas' Boundary Image of the Soul

3.1. The Use of Metaphor

Aquinas' metaphor for how the human soul can exist independently of and in substantial union with the body is depicted in the image of the soul (and of the human being) existing on the boundary of two worlds, the bodily world of time and the spiritual world of eternity. Compared with the more technical analysis of the soul - body relationship that he offers in various texts, some of which have been mentioned in Chapter 2, Aquinas' image of the boundary soul seems much more effective in portraying the soul's duality which results in its dual mode of cognition. For someone who is generally perceived to write in quite a technical fashion, it may seem surprising that St. Thomas employed metaphor to depict some of the central features of human existence such as its psychic character and the nature of intelligence in addition to its role in human bodiliness.

However, this tendency is in keeping with his general approach to metaphor elsewhere (1). In one of his earliest writings, his commentary on Boethius' treatise on the Trinity, Aquinas advocates that some divine truths be discreetly concealed in obscure language so as to enable

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(1) Cf. references throughout this work to Aquinas' metaphors of the circle, the sun and divine illumination.

people to grasp them better in so far as this is ever possible (2). The use of imaginative devices like metaphor and myth has a long tradition in the history of philosophical thought and Plato himself was one of the most skilled exponents in using such means to depict themes and concepts that might otherwise elude human comprehension. His images of the cave, vision, light and the sun in The Republic, for example, vividly suggest something of the nature of transcendent experiences. Such devices seem to have been particularly helpful for Plato's articulation of transcendence and he used symbolism to portray the existence of a realm beyond the finite which he sought to understand and for which he thought human beings were destined. Eric Voegelin claims that Plato's use of myth was unique among philosophers and he suggests that Plato quite deliberately resorted to it in order to convey the psychic excitement of transcendent experiences (3). The image of the winged soul in Phaedrus 246A-E, for instance, is used to depict both psychic transcendence and the negative aspects of embodiment. This tendency is also evident after Plato in the writings of Plotinus and others who saw a similar need

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(2) Super De Trin.2.4.

(3) Gerhart Niemeyer (trans. and ed.), Eric Voegelin, Anamnesis (Notre Dame & London : University of Notre Dame Press, 1978), p.22.

to depict the transcendent dimension in this fashion.

Aquinas' use of images may be understood as arising from the same concerns and he seems quite consciously to have borrowed his boundary formula of the soul from the Neoplatonically - inspired text, Liber de Causis. Like his predecessors and contemporaries, Aquinas wrote a commentary on this work and he was aware at the time of doing so that the text represented a summary of the thinking of Proclus as contained in The Elements of Theology (4). The specific passage in question where the formula appears is in Prop.II of Liber de Causis and reads as follows :

> Esse autem quod est post aeternitatem et supra tempus est Anima, quoniam est in horizonte aeternitatis inferius et supra tempus.

In his comments on this, Aquinas remarks that the soul has its being above motion or time and touches eternity. He also adapts the meaning of the term 'Anima' to refer specifically to the human soul though it may have a different connotation in the Neoplatonic framework of Liber de Causis (5). In

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(4) S. Thomae Aquinatis, In Librum De Causis Expositio (Taurini, Romae : Marietti, 1955), pp.15-16.

(5) Pegis suggests that the term 'Anima' refers to the divine soul in Liber de Causis. Cf. Anton Pegis, "The Separated Soul and its Nature in St. Thomas", pp.133-134, (footnote 7).

his comments on Prop.II, Aquinas mentions some propositions from Proclus' Elements of Theology from which he thinks the passage in question may be derived. These propositions include Prop.191 which states that "every participated soul is endowed with an eternal existence but a temporal activity." (6) There may also be a Plotinian connection here with Enn.IV.4.15 which, in the context of the soul, ascribes sameness to eternity and otherness to time. Dodds maintains that Prop.190 from Proclus' Elements of Theology is also related to the Thomistic formula in S.C.G.II.81 (7). This claims that "every soul is intermediate between the indivisible principles and those which are divided among bodies." (Prop.190) Dodds then traces the origin of this proposition to Plato's Timaeus 35A. The latter passage also describes the soul as an intermediate being that is constituted from what is indivisible and unchangeable, on the one hand, and from what is distributed among bodies, on the other. Dodds insists that the Timaeus passage forms the basis for the image of the frontier soul as it subsequently

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(6) E.R. Dodds (ed.), Proclus The Elements of Theology, p.169.

(7) Ibid., p.297, (footnote 1).

developed (8). The concept of the soul as a boundary between eternity and time and between the superior incorporeal intelligible entities and the inferior bodily beings of this perceptible world (9) is contained in the Platonically - inspired boundary formula of Aquinas. This provided him with a theoretical and imaginative structure which depicted the human intellect functioning in conjunction with and independently of the senses. Aquinas also knew that he was using an image from Proclean thought to interpret this kind of duality and, to this extent, he was certainly situating his view of the soul and the mind within the tradition of Platonism (10). This may have been expedient

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(8) Dodds, op.cit., p.297. Cf. also Gerard Verbeke, "Man as a 'Frontier' according to Aquinas" in Prof. Mag. G. Verbeke and Prof. D. Verhelst (ed.), Aquinas and Problems of His Time (Leuven & The Hague : Leuven University Press & Martinus Nijoff, 1976), pp.195-223, (here, p.206).

(9) The latter notion is found in Liber de Causis, Prop.VIII which states that intellect knows what is superior and inferior to it. Cf. also S.C.G.II.81.

(10) R.T. Wallis, Neoplatonism, pp.168-169. Wallis states that William of Moerbeke's translation of Liber de Causis available from 1268 onwards enabled Aquinas to detect its spurious Aristotelian authorship though this did not prevent St. Thomas from continuing to use the text.

for him to do since he would otherwise have found it very difficult to explain the duality of the soul's cognitive functioning, by using his understanding of Aristotle, for example. Nevertheless, apart from its usefulness for Aquinas, the importance of the image lies in its Platonic character. In addition, it is also true that many of the themes associated with it found their way into Christian thinking generally.

3.2. The Boundary Image in the Tradition of Platonism

The Platonic context in which the boundary theme is situated relates to one of Plato's principal concerns. This is in terms of the kind of link that holds between the changing corruptible bodily world of appearance and the unchanging immortal and spiritual realm of intelligible reality. The Symposium suggests that love provides such a bonding. In this dialogue, Diotima tells Socrates that divine love is "halfway between mortal and immortal" (202 D), "a very powerful spirit.... half - way between god and man" (202 E). When Socrates enquires further as to what this might mean, Diotima describes a process of mediation in which spirits, like the spirit of love, participate :

> They are the envoys and interpreters that ply between heaven and earth, flying upward with our worship and our prayers, and descending with the

> heavenly answers and commandments, and since they are between the two estates they weld both sides together and merge them into one great whole. They form the medium of the prophetic arts, of the priestly rites of sacrifice, initiation, and incantation, of divination and of sorcery, for the divine will not mingle directly with the human, and it is only through the mediation of the spirit world that man can have any intercourse, whether waking or sleeping, with the gods. And the man who is versed in such matters is said to have spiritual powers, as opposed to the mechanical powers of the man who is expert in the more mundane arts. There are many spirits, and many kinds of spirits too, and Love is one of them. (Symp.202E-203A)

The unifying power of such mediation between the divine and human worlds therefore contains a definite religious character which brings about a spiritual disposition in those human beings who attune themselves to the world above. Love is "neither mortal nor immortal" (Symp.203E) and "midway between ignorance and wisdom" (Symp.203E-204A). Friedlander comments on Plato's view of the in - between by remarking that it is only in the world beyond that Plato thinks that the highest form of love will demonstrate its philosophical value and will blossom in a truly authentic

and interpersonal way (11). In the Cave Allegory, the philosopher is also depicted as an intermediary who mediates the vision of what is illuminated outside the cave to the prisoners still trapped in its darkness (Rep.515C-519C). Undoubtedly, it was Socrates who personified philosophic mediation for Plato, a role that is interpreted in terms of being a midwife to knowledge in Theaetetus 149A-151D.

Plato's view of the human soul as touching the extremes of a bodily changing world of appearance and the unchanging realm of spiritual reality, is associated with this constellation of themes that describe a mediating entity between both dimensions. His concept of the soul as a transcendent (12), substantially subsistent, unchanging, incorruptible (13) and divine entity (14) originating from and belonging intrinsically to the intelligible world while also finding itself in an earthly changing realm due to some kind of primordial misfortune or 'fall' (15) defines its ambivalence and difficulties. The philosophical implications

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(11) Hans Meyerhoff (trans.), Paul Friedlander, Plato Vol I An Introduction (Princeton N.J. : Princeton University Press, 1969), p.53.

(12) Phaedrus 246C.

(13) Phaedo 79D, 80B ; Phaedrus 245C, 246A.

(14) Phaedo 80AB, Laws 726A.

(15) Phaedrus 246C.

of the soul's transcendence are described by Eric Voegelin as follows :

> Being comes into grasp because the thinker has achieved consciousness of the inner dimension of his soul ; with an understanding of the soul as something that has an inner dimension, there is correlatively given the consciousness of a border of this something and of a Beyond of this border. Being is not discovered by a static man, for in the act of discovery the soul of man itself differentiates and gains consciousness of its dimension. With the Parmenidean consciousness of the way that leads towards the border of transcendence, the soul itself moves into the field of philosophical speculation. We can speculate about transcendent Being because the soul is a sensorium of transcendence. (16)

This in - between or psychic metaxic ambience is described by Plato in terms of the human soul functioning at the interface of the realms of becoming and of the unchanging reality of intelligible being. He sums up the duality of human existence by depicting it as mortal and immortal by

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(16) Eric Voegelin, Order and History Vol 2 (Louisiana : Louisiana State University Press, 1957), p.221.

virtue of being a composite structure of body and soul (17). Friedlander explains the implications for Plato in this way:

> Once Plato has discovered the world of eternal being, man is part of both worlds and of neither; he is between both worlds, belonging to the world of becoming and passing away because of his body and the "lower parts of his soul", belonging to the world of being because of the eternal part of his soul. Thus it is the discovery of the world of ideas that no longer permits man to be altogether a member of one undivided world and forces upon him the separation into "body and soul". (18)

The cumulative effect of Plato's views on this subject, not forgetting the reference in Timaeus 35A, which Dodds (19) and Verbeke (20) regard as being so significant, clearly

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(17) Phaedrus 246B-D.

(18) Paul Friedlander, Plato Vol I, pp.29-30.

(19) Dodds maintains that this passage is "the main source of the conception of the soul as the frontier between two worlds, which gained currency from the time of Poseidonius onwards and dominates Neoplatonic psychology." Cf. E.R. Dodds (ed.), Proclus The Elements of Theology, p.297.

(20) Gerard Verbeke, "Man as a 'Frontier' according to Aquinas", p.206.

points to the soul as a frontier between two worlds which is later taken up by those whose thinking was formed by the tradition of Platonism.

One of those to do so was Philo Judaeus of Alexandria whose views were shaped by Hellenic thought, including that of Plato. In his text, On the Creation, during the course of an explication of Genesis 2.7 on human creation, he depicts the human being as a composite made of an earthly substance and divine breath. This earthly substance is thought by Philo to consist of the clay that is moulded into a human form whereas it is the divine breath that confers immortality. He concludes that the human being :

> is on the borderland between mortal and immortal nature, partaking of each so far as is needful, ... created at once mortal and immortal, mortal in respect of the body, but in respect of the mind immortal. (De Op. Mundi, 135)

Philo repeats this view of the human being residing between mortality and immortality in other texts and it is clearly a significant aspect of his theory of human duality (21).

There are many references also in Plotinus' writings to

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(21) e.g. in On the Virtues, 9. Cf. also On Rewards and Punishments, 62 where Philo describes human bondage as lying midway between virtue and vice.

the intermediate nature of the soul (22). As a follower of Plato, Plotinus was understandably concerned to demonstrate the linkage between the perceptible and intelligible realms and his famous account in Ennead IV.8.1 of an out of body experience personifies the enigma of moving between these dimensions. This is revealed in Plotinus' bafflement about how he could have "come down" to discursive reasoning and embodiment after encountering the ineffable realm of beauty and divinity which he describes. The subject seems to have preoccupied him since the theme of the soul's ability "to live by turns the life There, and the life here" (23) provides a frequent issue for comment in his writings as it does in the following passage :

> Since this nature is twofold, partly intelligible and partly perceptible, it is better for the soul to be in the intelligible, but all the same, since it has this kind of nature, it is necessarily bound to be able to participate in the

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(22) The Plotinian references are set out as far as possible according to the chronological order described in Porphyry On The Life of Plotinus and The Order of His Books in A.H. Armstrong, Plotinus Vol I (Cambridge, Mass. & London : Harvard University Press & William Heinemann Ltd., 1966), pp.15-25.

(23) Enn.IV.8.4.

> perceptible, and it should not be annoyed with itself because, granted that all things are not the best, it occupies a middle rank among realities, belonging to that divine part but being on the lowest edge of the intelligible, and having a common boundary with the perceptible nature, gives something to it of what it has in itself and receives something from it in return..
>
> (Enn.IV.8.7)

Some of the sentiments expressed in this passage are also reflected in the boundary formula of Liber de Causis. This kind of split - level human existence is attributed in Enn.III.4.2 to an involvement in the sensory and vegetative biological processes that characterise animals and plants while also constantly striving to transcend these processes by tending towards "the upper world". Like Aquinas will say later in his discussion of rapture in De Ver.13.1, Plotinus remarks on the human inclination to indulge animality at the expense of a higher life. The majority of people, claims Plotinus in Enn.III.2.8, occupy a position midway between animality and divinity which lies between the extremes of those who "become like gods and others like beasts". However, the mixture that we are enables us to remain in contact with the worlds above and below and defines each of us as an intelligible universe, a

point also made later by Aquinas (24). Plotinus writes :

> For the soul is many things, and all things, both the things above and the things below down to the limits of all life, and we are each one of us an intelligible universe, making contact with this lower world with the powers of the soul below, but with the intelligible world by its powers above and the powers of the universe ; and we remain with all the rest of our intelligible part above, but by its ultimate fringe we are tied to the world below, giving a kind of outflow from it to what is below, or rather an activity, by which that intelligible part is not itself lessened."
>
> (Enn.III.4.3)

Since it lies on the frontier of the intelligible realm (Enn.IV.4.2), its memory sustains its awareness of belonging to the latter and keeps it in a state of equilibrium between that and the world here below (Enn.IV.4.3). This polarity of two worlds is also reflected in time and eternity, both of which we touch, moving up and down, as it were, between them (Enn.III.7.7). This latter theme will later emerge in the Thomistic account of the boundary image. The middle position of the soul is

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(24) Cf. Aquinas' notion of "minor mundus" which appears in II Sent. d.1, q.2, art.3.

also demonstrated in its having two sets of powers, the intellectual and the sensory, a point also made later by Aquinas in S.T.I.77.2 :

> we are this, the principal part of the soul, in the middle between two powers, a worse and a better, the worse that of sense - perception, the better that of Intellect. (Enn.V.3.3)

It is uncanny, though not surprising, given the influence of Platonism on Christian thought, how many of these themes are found again in some form or other in the conclusions that Aquinas will later draw from his boundary formula.

3.3. Christian and Islamic Views on the Boundary Image

Christian thinkers who used the formula generally did so from a not dissimilar theological need to depict human life as being located in a visible, imperfect and transitory earthly world from which people try to reach out to the invisible, perfect and permanent abode of God in heaven. Gregory of Nyassa, whose views were shaped by Platonism, depicted human life as a split - level existence, in which we belong to the visible world by our bodies and to the invisible world by our souls (25). The human being is thus a connecting link between both and stands at the summit of the visible world as an animal endowed with reason. This

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(25) Etienne Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages, p.57.

theme will also be taken up by St. Thomas when he describes the boundary image of the soul, for example in S.C.G.II.68.

In De Natura Hominis, Nemesius assigns the human being, made of body and soul, to the borderline of the world of spirits and the world of bodies (26). This intermediate position between the rational, on the one hand, and bodiliness and animality, on the other, is described as follows in Chapter I of De Natura Hominis :

> Itaque homo inter utriusque naturae, utentis ratione et expertis, fines interjectus, si corporis voluptatibus delinitus eas praeoptaverit, bestiarum vitam amplectur ... (27)

Even the first human beings were positioned on this frontier between mortality and immortality, according to Nemesius in the same chapter :

> Hebraei hominem ab initio, neque plane mortalem, neque plane immortalem genitum esse ajunt, sed veluti in confinio cadentis et sempiternae naturae esse positum ... (28)

This intermediate human position reflects the universal continuity of order in reality and points to the

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(26) Gilson, Ibid., p.60.

(27) Nemesius Emesenus, De Natura Hominis (Halae Magdeburgicae : apud Joan. Jac. Gebaeur, MDCCCII), pp.4-5.

(28) Ibid., p.5.

existence of God (29). Human beings have something in common with all levels of reality, the inorganic (through the body) and plant and animal life and, in addition, with the life of reason. Their borderline position also provides them with the choice to turn towards either spiritual or material things.

Another Christian thinker who conceived of the human being as bordering between pure spirits and pure bodies was Maximus of Chrysopolis (30). He claimed that we were created so as to serve as the connecting link between the spiritual and bodily realms and that we participate in both, in the multiplicity of matter by the body while being united with God through the mind. However, although the aim of human life is to intellectually unify what is multiple in reality and so bring things back to God, the rejection of God by human beings in favour of the knowledge of things weakened this bond of unity. Since Maximus thought that to be and to be unified were identical, he claims that this human aversion from God would have almost destroyed humankind were it not for God's intervention which unified divine and human natures in the Incarnation and rejoined all things to God. Maximus thought that we are therefore

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(29) Etienne Gilson, History of Western Philosophy in the Middle Ages, p.57.

(30) Ibid., pp.87-88.

located at the centre of creation and, by returning to God, will draw the whole world in that direction.

Other Christian writers, like St. John Damascene, held similar views (31) with the result that, by the medieval period, the concept of the frontier human being was a fairly familiar one in Christian thought. In the tradition of Islam, the philosopher Avicenna, whose writings were to influence Aquinas, also conceived of the soul's split - level existence between the bodily world and the realm of higher intelligibility. This is not surprising in view of the Neoplatonic nature of Islamic philosophy. Avicenna described the soul as being two - faced :

> (The soul) has special faculties which establish the relationship between itself and each plane; the practical faculty which the human soul possesses in relation to the lower plane, which is the body and its control and management ; and the theoretical faculty in relation to the higher plane, from which it passively receives and acquires intelligibles. It is as if our soul has two faces : one turned towards the body, and it must not be influenced by any requirements of a bodily nature ; and the other turned towards the

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(31) Gerard Verbeke, "Man as a 'Frontier' according to Aquinas", p.213.

> higher principles, and it must always be ready to receive from what is There in the Higher Plane and to be influenced by it. (32)

It is to this tradition of thought originating with Plato and then emerging in Christianity and in the writings of Avicenna that Aquinas' boundary formula of the soul belongs.

3.4. Aquinas' Use of the Boundary Image

For the most part, Aquinas used the boundary image to emphasise that in the human being there is a mixture, as it were, of bodily time - bound reality and the eternal realm of intelligibility and it is in terms of this that human existence is constituted as unique. This is not only associated with the ability to have two distinct sets of powers, the intellectual and the sensory, which result in having two corresponding forms of cognition, one that occurs in conjunction with the senses, the other operating independently of these. More fundamentally, it has to do with the singular nature of the link that humankind represents in the hierarchical chain of being. Our bodily and incorporeal constitution enables us, according to Aquinas, to mediate each dimension to the other, this mediation ideally occurring in relation to what is good. It is this duality that makes the human being unique. Such uniqueness is considerably enhanced and confirmed in the

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(32) F. Rahman (trans.), Avicenna's Psychology, p.33.

supernatural divine - human relationship that occurs in the Incarnate Word. The latter is also related to the flexibility of choice that is offered by human nature and is associated with the discursive reasoning that is linked with embodiment. Such are the general applications of Aquinas' boundary formula which will now be examined in some detail.

3.5. The Texts

It seems clear that Aquinas was familiar with the boundary image from an early stage in his intellectual development since we can find references to it in his commentary in Scriptum Super Libros Sententiarum where he employs the formula in a very explicit theological Christian setting. In II Sent.d.1.q.2.a.3, Aquinas sets out to examine the centrality of human existence as a reference point for other created things. He asks in this connection whether all things were made for human beings (Utrum omnia sint facta propter hominem). Aquinas then depicts the human being in terms of a metaphor mentioned already in connection with Plotinus and some early Christian writers. This describes each human being as a minor universe in whom, as it were, all natures flow together :

> ordo universi est finis totius creaturae. Sed in homine est quaedam similitudo ordinis universi; unde et minor mundus igitur : quia omnes naturae quasi in homine confluunt. (In II Sent.d.1.q.2.a.3)

Looked at from this point of view, Aquinas concludes that it is true to say that humankind constitutes the goal of all things, a conclusion for which he proceeds to argue in some detail and with certain qualifications in the body of the article. In relation to this motif of 'minor mundus', Verbeke observes that there is a link between Aquinas' perception of the human being as a micro - universe and his concept of the soul as a boundary between the material world and the realm of intelligibility (33). This conclusion is confirmed by Aquinas' response in the text to the third objection where he states that although human beings are superior to bodily creatures, they are inferior to angels, a point often made elsewhere in his writings (34). The same connection is made in S.C.G.II.68 in that part of the text where the boundary reference is used even though there is no mention here of the notion of 'minor mundus'. The boundary reference itself occurs in the Prologus to III Sent. where once again he employs a similar metaphor to that used in II Sent.d.1.q.2.art.3 to contextualise the image. This is the metaphor of a river that depicts reality Neoplatonically by stating that all that has come from God must return to

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(33) Gerard Verbeke, "Man as a 'Frontier' according to Aquinas", pp.198-199.

(34) Cf. also De Ver.19.1, S.C.G.II.68, S.T.I.89.1.

God, through God (35). Aquinas also thinks that the return of rivers to their original source symbolically represents, from a Christian point of view, the mystery of the Incarnation and its many effects. The reverting rivers also signify the natural goods of being (esse), living (vivere) and understanding (intelligere) that God gives to creatures. Since human beings uniquely contain all three aspects of existence, life and thought which other creatures do not possess in this way, Aquinas' conclusion is that this situates the human being at the horizon and border of a spiritual and bodily nature as a mediator between both and capable of sharing in the benefits of each :

> Homo enim est quasi horizon et confinium spiritualis et corporalis naturae, ut quasi medium inter utrasque, utrasque bonitas participet et corporales et spirituales.

In terms of the Incarnation, this means, according to St. Thomas, that in the unique and mysterious conjunction of divine and human nature, all the rivers of natural goodness revert to their divine principle. This two - way movement of goodness from and to God and the references to reversion again reveals the Platonism that is reflected in Aquinas' boundary formula. In The Elements of Theology, Proclus had

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(35) Cf. also the Neoplatonically - inspired text of S.C.G.IV.1 mentioned earlier in Chapter I, Section I.5.

written about things reverting to their original principle (Prop.31) and, before him, Plotinus emphasis the need for souls to return to their primary source (Enn.V.1.1). The ultimate reference for these views was undoubtedly Plato himself for whom the concepts of anamnesis and of psychic reversion were of central importance. The use of the boundary image at this early stage of his intellectual career suggests that Aquinas also saw the potential in it for interpreting, from a Christian point of view, the unique nature of being human and the doctrine of the Incarnation in which he believed.

In Summa Contra Gentiles, four references to the boundary formula will be examined. The first is contained in S.C.G.II.68 in the context of Aquinas' analysis of how an intelligent substance, such as the human soul, can be the form of the body. In this text, Aquinas situates the soul - body relationship in terms of the interconnectedness of things in the hierarchy of being. He begins by describing the human body as supreme in the category of bodies by virtue of its relationship with the soul. The intellectual soul, however, is the lowest of the intelligent substances because of the human mind's dependence on the senses by comparison with the superior intelligences who do not require sensory data in order to think. These factors, Aquinas concludes, locate the intellectual soul "on the horizon and confines of things corporeal and incorporeal,

inasmuch as it is an intelligent substance, and yet the form of a body." The remainder of Chapter 68 is devoted to a discussion on the hierarchy of forms ranging from the lowest forms of inorganic matter to the highest forms of the superior intellects, to which latter category Aquinas claims the human soul is linked. He reminds us at the end of this chapter that, although the soul can cognitively function independently of any bodily organ, the fact that it requires the assistance of the senses and the imagination in bodily life indicates how natural it is for soul and body to be united in order to complete the human species. A somewhat similar discussion occurs in De Anima, Question I where Aquinas also examines how the soul can be the form of the body, while remaining a subsistent entity in itself. As is typical elsewhere in his treatment of this issue, Aquinas establishes to his own satisfaction that the soul's cognitive nature defines it as transcendent to matter and subsistent in being. It is in this context that he discusses the soul's intermediate locus. Since it is superior to the forms of other bodies, like plants and irrational animals because of its ability to transcend matter and, on the other hand, is inferior to the forms of independent intelligences by its need to function discursively in conjunction with the senses, the soul is "constituted on the boundary line between corporeal and separate substances."

Aquinas develops the theme of S.C.G.II.68 in the

reference to the boundary image that occurs in S.C.G.II.81. The issue here is whether the soul perishes when the body is corrupted with the onset of death. St. Thomas argues that, on the contrary, the soul can then understand in a different way when it is thus separated from the body and he likens the latter kind of understanding to the knowledge possessed by superior intelligences. He argues that this form of cognition does not depend on the use of the imagination since it is a consequence of a different mode of being for the soul. In fact, remarks Aquinas in a way which reminds us of Phaedo 66B-67B, the more the soul is withdrawn from the body, the better its capacity for understanding. He cites, as an example of this, the virtue of temperance which, by encouraging a withdrawal from bodily pleasures, brings about a greater noetic capacity. Aquinas also argues that the kind of mental withdrawal which he believes occurs in cases of prophetic dreams and ecstasy and in similar experiences produces a very high level of mental clarity. The reason for this is :

> because, since the human soul... is on the boundary line of corporeal and incorporeal substances, as though it were on the horizon of eternity and time, by withdrawing from the lower world it approaches the higher. (S.C.G.II.81)

Aquinas concludes that when the soul is totally separated from the body, it can then function cognitively as separate

intelligences do and will receive some intellectual input from them also. This is a higher level of understanding, he repeats, compared with sensory - based cognition.

It is difficult to read Chapter 81 without getting the distinct impression that what is being presented here is a Platonic soul under another guise. Indeed, Aquinas' view that the discursive knowledge of the embodied soul is replaced by a far superior form of cognition when the soul is released from bodily pleasures and from the body itself is precisely Plato's thesis in The Phaedo. The soul thus becomes depicted by Aquinas as a substantial intelligence that is now free to function at its best when totally independent of its embodied mode of existence. In addition, there is the Neoplatonic motif of superior intelligence emanating to the separated soul. It is worth recalling what is said in Phaedo 79D where Plato describes the positive effects that occur when the soul is wholly separated from the body. It then "investigates by itself" and passes over "into the realm of the pure and everlasting" of immortality and immutability. It is " free from interference" and makes contact with "beings of a similar nature" and, in this psychic condition, wisdom is finally attained. These Platonic themes are reflected in what Aquinas has to say in his references to the human soul in S.C.G.II.81, specifically in terms of his declaration that a "higher mode of understanding" will occur at the separation of soul from

body.

In S.C.G.III.61, Aquinas is in a position to take his concept of the boundary image a stage further by using it to explain how it is possible to see God in eternal life. He examines this possibility in relation to the nature of time and eternity by remarking in the relevant section of Chapter 61 that "the intellective soul is created on the borderline between eternity and time as stated in de Causis." He gives as reasons the low status of the human soul in the order of intelligences and its capacity to be superior to matter and independent of it. When the latter ability to transcend matter is linked with the soul's activity as regards temporal things, its dual relationship to eternity and time becomes clear. With regard to the former, Thomas thinks that the soul's relationship to eternity disposes it to participate in the eternal vision of God. Such a vision by contrast with the time - bound process of discursive thought is timeless and occurs in a single intuition where God is seen "at once and at a glance" :

"simul et uno intuitu" (S.C.G.III.61)

Aquinas' conscious application of the boundary formula from Liber de Causis to the question of the soul's capacity for the beatific vision clearly indicates its importance for him as a key image in depicting the psychological and cognitive structure that makes it possible for human beings to come to

know God best. The text in S.C.G.III.61 may therefore be seen as developing to a still greater degree the implications contained in the earlier references in S.C.G.II.Chs.68 and 81 which might be applied to the beatific vision.

Finally, Aquinas uses the boundary formula in S.C.G.IV.55 to explain the Christian belief that God assumed human nature in the Incarnate Word. He argues that for God to do so was appropriate because :

> Man is composed of a spiritual and corporeal nature, standing as it were on the boundaries of both, so that whatsoever is done for man's good would seem to affect all creatures.

The implications of this reference in relation to goodness are once again linked to Aquinas' concept of a hierarchy of being. The latter consists of purely bodily beings that are inferior to humans and thus may be used for human purposes and, to some extent, are subject to humankind, according to Thomas. On the other hand, there are the superior spiritual creatures like the angels who share the same ultimate goal as human beings, namely, to see the nature of God. These points of mutual contact, Aquinas conjectures, make it fitting that God should have chosen to assume human nature in a personal union with His divinity since humans represent a way of uniting all things to God. This conclusion, which continues the same line of thought as

the boundary references mentioned earlier, is further explained by Aquinas in S.C.G.IV.55 in terms of human choice. God chose to unite with human nature, claims Thomas, because only rational beings can act as independent and free agents. What makes human beings particularly suitable is their ability to be redeemed precisely because of their capacity to change their minds for the better at any time up until the point of death. Hence God's choice of human nature which enhances both human uniqueness and freedom of being.

Finally, there is Aquinas' boundary metaphor in S.T.I.77.2 which is used to depict the duality of powers in the soul. Towards the end of this article, Aquinas states that one of the reasons for the variety of powers in the human soul is because of its intermediate status since :

> it is on the confines of spiritual and corporeal creatures ; and therefore the powers of both meet together in the soul. (S.T.I.77.2)

The boundary formula thus depicts the composite reality that defines human life as unique and suggests the theological implications of this to the mind of Aquinas. The flexibility of the formula allows it to express the complexity of human duality as an intrinsic feature of human integrity and of human life in its most formal sense. As a metaphor for what it means to be human, notwithstanding its Thomistic character, it belongs to the Platonic tradition and, perhaps of even greater importance, is the fact that

the very instability of the image also reveals the essential ambivalence which lies at the core of the human relationship between the material and intelligible realms.

3.6. Some Implications of Aquinas' Boundary Image

From a philosophic point of view, the boundary metaphor as it is used by Aquinas presumes a hierarchy of being consisting of bodily non - intelligent entities and non - bodily intelligences with human beings retaining an intermediate status between these extremes because of what it has in common with both groups. This interpretation of the hierarchy of being is associated with Neoplatonism, as has been noted, and the theory itself of such a hierarchy no doubt reached Aquinas from a number of such sources, including the writings of the Psuedo - Dionysius. The boundary formula which sets out the role of human existence in this chain of being is not without its flaws, however, since it tends to suggest that the body and the physical powers no longer have any great importance during non - sensory cognition. This point will become clearer in Chapter 4. The positive value of the formula, on the other hand, is that, as an image of instability, it resonates with the human experience of an ambivalent existence which seems to be linked to our composite constitution of bodiliness and incorporeality. The tension and conflict that result from this may be experienced as a difficulty of

maintaining a state of equilibrium between these two dimensions because of an ever - persistent tendency to incline more towards one with adverse consequences for the other. This is implied in the boundary formula and again becomes clear in Aquinas' theory of rapture. The mixture that we are may render it ultimately impossible to make a satisfactory withdrawal from bodiliness towards the realm of pure intelligibility without somehow diminishing our status as human beings. This is a problem which is identified by Aquinas, for example in S.C.G.IV.79, where he describes the unnatural state of separation between body and soul. His faith tells him that this will be divinely resolved by the resurrection of the body.

Our present human condition is therefore fragile with alternative and often conflicting demands being made on our complex yet unfied duality. We seem to be defined, at least for the present, as creatures of paradox, striving for timelessness in a temporal world and for indestructibility in an ever - changing environment. We try to aim for permanence and stability in a universe of flux and are thus characterised by a state of existential ambivalence which demands some kind of appropriate formulation. This is what the boundary formula tries to achieve by metaphorically representing human life and human aspirations. The metaphor's implications, from another point of view, are related to the human search for the universal in a world of

particularity and for unity in multiplicity. Its richness of meaning fundamentally intimates that reality for us is a unique tapestry woven from the spiritual and the bodily. This, in turn, enables us to straddle both dimensions and to interiorise them within a personal unity.

For all of these reasons, the formula is of central epistemological and theological significance and, for Aquinas, in particular, it implicitly grounds his understanding of the ambivalent character of human rationality. The boundary image, as understood by him, also suggests that, in the discovery that life is an unfinished process, fundamental human expectations are still not in vain and can yet be realised. This is part of the meaning of human duality where, as citizens of two worlds in which we strive to keep our footing, we can experience ourselves, as the Platonists and Aquinas might put it, like wayfarers in exile. For Aquinas, the resolution to this dilemma of contradiction ultimately lies in the revelatory character of the divine - human encounter in which he believed. This is also marked by paradox in that divine reality becomes human in order to divinise humankind. Aquinas' view is that it is in terms of such a relationship that the meaning of the boundary nature of human existence will finally be revealed.

Chapter 4

The Knowledge of God in Rapture

4.1. Some Preliminary Considerations

There seems to be nothing in Aristotle's writings which corresponds to the kind of views put forward by Aquinas when he comes to discuss how the human mind can know God's essence in the state of rapture before death independently of the senses and of the imagination. Aristotle maintained that the thinking faculty must use images which are derived from sense experience (1). It is also clear from what Thomas himself writes about rapture that he does not base his approach on that of Aristotle. On the contrary, the whole tone of the Thomistic account seems very much in line with the kind of views expressed on the role of the intellect and the senses which are associated with the tradition of Platonism (2). This is because the whole point of rapture is

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(1) D.W. Hamlyn (trans.), Aristotle's De Anima Books II,III (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1968), 431b2. The vexed question of the separable, immortal and eternal intellect described in De Anima Book III, Ch.5 430a18 does not affect Aristotle's general view on this issue.

(2) Cf. also Patrick Quinn, "Aquinas' Concept of the Body and Out of Body Situations", The Heythrop Journal Vol 34, No.4, October 1993, pp.387-400.

to free the mind from the sensory powers in order to enable it to see God. Aquinas insists that such cognitive independence entails the curtailment of the sense faculties which might interfere with the mind's rapturous vision of God at this sublime level. Rapture thus describes a mental state, transitory in nature, in which the beatific vision occurs in life before death. It is defined by Aquinas as a mental elevation contrary to nature in which the mind is divinely and involuntarily snatched away, so to speak, from the apprehension of sensory entities and uplifted to divine reality (3). However, he also insists that this mental state is restricted to a very small number of privileged people, notably St. Paul. Aquinas' own analysis is based on the Pauline report in 2 Corinthians 12.1-6 which goes as follows:

> I know a man still in Christ who, fourteen years ago, was caught up - whether still in the body or out of it, I do not know ; God knows - right into the third heaven. I do know however, that this same person - whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know ; God knows - was caught up

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(3) De Ver.13.1 & S.T.II-II.175.1. The Latin term "raptus" is defined as a snatching away by violence in Charlton T. Lewis, An Elementary Latin Dictionary (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1891/1992), pp.698-699.

into paradise and heard things which must not
and cannot be put into human language. (2 Cor.12.2-5)

This text provides the principal basis for the Thomistic investigation of rapture and is the source for Aquinas' own belief that Paul had a vision of God during this experience. In De Ver.13.2 and S.T.II-II.175.3, Thomas cites the authority of Augustine in support of his view, arguing rather forcefully in the former text that the vision must have occurred and he tries to persuade his readers to agree with him. However, a reading of 2 Corinthians 12.1-6 would suggest that it is by no means certain that Paul had a vision of God at all but for our purposes here, it is not important to establish whether he did or not. What is of interest is that Aquinas thought that Paul saw God's essence before death and, as a result, felt compelled to explain how this could have occurred when the senses and the body were still present. His conclusions, as will be seen, have certain implications for his theory of what takes place in the minds of those who see God after death and in the state of resurrection. The theoretical grounds for Aquinas' defence of rapture are thus based on his assumption, which was formulated in the boundary image and discussed in the last chapter, that the human mind can function independently of the senses under certain conditions.

4.2. The Possibility of Rapture

The first question to be asked about this issue is whether the rapturous vison of God is possible for the human mind before death. This would obviously be strongly disputed in the contemporary world, especially by those who deny the existence of a transcendent God. At the very least, it could be said that what Thomas defined as rapture represents in effect a state of mental delusion which is interpreted as visio Dei from a religious standpoint. There is something in this suggestion since, as will be said later, it is difficult to find any satisfactory criteria other than a very subjective intuition in Aquinas' account which would help us to distinguish between an authentic mystical experience of God and the sort of delusions which characterise, for example, a self - induced out of body state. It is worth noting, though, that Aquinas was aware of these problems and set out to confront them. In S.T.II-II.175.1, he outlines three objections against rapture. The first states that rapture is unnecessary because the natural tendency of human beings is to be elevated to God. The second objection strikes a more contemporary chord and rejects the possibility that human beings could ever act in a way which is beyond their nature. The third claims that, since God does not act violently towards us, this rules out rapture which by its very definition denotes violence and force. Aquinas replies to these arguments as is customary at

the end of the article. In response to the first, he insists that, though we naturally tend towards God, our elevation to divine reality and the withdrawal from sensory experience is not a natural process (S.T.II-II.175.1 ad 1). This, of course, presumes the theory of rapture already contained in the body of the article itself and in the five articles which follow it and also the discussion on this issue in De Veritate Question 13. Aquinas answers the second objection by saying that it is quite appropriate for human beings to be uplifted to divine reality since they are made in God's image and are therefore intellectually oriented towards God. To reach this goal, however, requires divine help by means of which the human mind is raised to God, not in a way that is contrary to nature but by way of transcending it :

> Unde quod sic elevetur mens a Deo per raptum, non est contra naturam, sed facultatem naturae. (S.T.II-II.175.1 ad 2)

This theme is a familiar one in the Thomistic writings and is linked with the paradox mentioned in Chapter 2 of this work on how the human mind's natural desire for God can only be attained by supernatural means (4). In reply to the third objection, Aquinas justifies the force or violence of rapture on the grounds that a stronger compulsion than

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(4) Cf. also S.T.I.89.1 ad 3.

nature is needed to elevate the human mind to God. This point is illustrated at the beginning of the corpus of the text in S.T.II-II.175.1 by the example of a falling stone. The stone's natural inclination to fall downwards is increased if it is forcefully thrown down since it then travels with a much greater velocity in the same direction (5). Similarly, suggests Aquinas, rapture accelerates the process of taking the human mind to God towards Whom the human being is tending in any case. This also implies that rapture is an involuntary activity which cannot be self - induced.

Although it broadly follows the approach in S.T.II-II.175.1, the emphasis in De Veritate 13.1 is not so much on the possibility of rapture as an experience whose existence can be fundamentally questioned but rather on whether it is contrary to nature. In keeping with its specific concerns, rapture is defined in De Veritate as a state of elevation contrary to nature :

"Raptus id est contra naturam elevatum." (De Ver.13.1)

This definition stands directly opposed to the conclusion of the twelve objections in Article 1, all of which deny that rapture is contrary to human nature. The first objection, which is similar to objection 1 in S.T.II-II.175.1, reiterates the view that the knowledge ascribed to rapture

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(5) Cf. also De Ver.13.1 ad 5.

is in keeping with the natural desire of human beings to know God. Aquinas' reply is interesting because of the distinction he makes between what is according to or contrary to nature for the same thing when in different states (6). He gives the illustration of a baby boy against whose nature it would be contrary to be born with the fully grown stature of a man. Aquinas applies this notion to the human knowledge of God claiming that, though initially it is natural to know God through sensory experience, it is also natural for the human mind in the beatified state to know God's essence with divine assistance. To achieve beatific knowledge in this life would be as contrary to human nature, according to Aquinas, as it would be unnatural for a baby boy to have a beard.

Behind these vivid illustrations lies the notion of the nature of a subsistent human soul capable of cognitively functioning in both embodied and disembodied states, a conclusion that is linked with the boundary image of the soul in S.C.G.II.81 where there is also a reference to ecstasy. Indeed it almost goes without saying that the

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(6) Note also Aquinas' reference in De Ver.13.1 ad 1 to Maimonides as regards a thing being different when in the state of becoming from when it has perfect existence :

"eo quod non est eadem natura rei dum est in fieri, et dum est in perfecto esse, ut dicit Rabbi Moyses".

implications of his theory of the boundary soul are reflected in his treatment of this whole issue. Aquinas' view of nature, however, as suggested in his replies to the objections in De Veritate 13.1 is rather ambiguous and suggests a form of independence for the human soul which would seem by implication to undermine the importance of human embodiment. The latter effect seems to be a consequence of rapture since, in this experience, as will be seen, the senses and the body itself become quite redundant. Another issue that arises from the bearded baby example is whether Aquinas is implicitly suggesting that, in some way, it is natural for the human mind to be capable of seeing God. The reply in De Veritate 13.1 ad 1 also hints at the difficulties that will confront Aquinas in his attempts to explain how the human mind, although being very dependent on the senses, can yet act independently of them during rapture.

In the body of this article (De Ver.13.1), Aquinas explains what the extraordinary character of rapture entails for the mind and the sensory powers. He begins by insisting that, although our minds naturally depend for knowledge on the senses and on the imagination, it is possible for human beings to focus so directly and exclusively on intelligible reality that everything that is inferior to the latter is transcended. Presumably these inferior things refer to the mundane concerns of everyday life and the physical

environment in which we are situated. Aquinas also suggests here that the latter impedes us in our noetic attempts to reach divine reality, a criticism which is found elsewhere in his writings (7).

He attributes the ability to focus one's attention on intelligible entities to something divine within us rather than to any human disposition as such :

"non est ejus inquantum est homo, sed inquantum aliquid in eo divinum existit.." (De Ver.13.1)

Although he cites Aristotle in support of this conclusion, there is an underlying current of Platonism at work here also. The possession of an inner God - like noetic disposition is a notable feature of Platonic thought and is reflected elsewhere in Aquinas' writings in the form of a divine illumination (8). Aquinas' comment on the divine within us also brings to mind Plotinus' enigmatic remark before dying where he talks about having the divine within us (9). Indeed it is interesting to compare what Aquinas

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(7) Cf. Aquinas' discussion on the obstacles to the rational discovery of God in Chapter 1, Sections I.4.1 and I.4.2.

(8) Super De Trin.1.2, S.C.G.III.53, S.T.I.89.1 ad 3.

(9) A.H. Armstrong (trans.), Plotinus Vol I, p.7 ; John Dillon (abridged with introd. & notes), Stephen MacKenna (trans.), Plotinus The Enneads (London : Penguin Books, 1991), p.ciii.

says about Pauline rapture with Plotinus' own description of his mystical experience described in Enn.IV.8.1. The latter depicts his out of body vision of a state of great beauty which enabled Plotinus "to come to identify with the divine" (10).

St. Thomas proceeds in De Veritate 13.1 to make a distinction between this divine impetus or disposition and the kind of sensory activity that occurs independently of understanding and reasoning. The latter, he concludes, does not pertain to being human as such but is something shared in common with brute animals. Compared with the transcendent impulse of the mind towards intelligible reality, the ability to grasp only what is sensory is merely a function of our animality, he suggests. The impression once again is of a split - level quality to human life, a boundary between divinisation and animality, which is another Plotinian theme earlier discussed in Chapter 3. These represent the parameters of human life and thought with human beings tending alternatively to advance closer to the divine realm towards the vision of God or towards becoming more immersed in bodily concerns. As Aquinas portrays it here, there is opposition between these alternatives with the result that opting for one appears to mean that the other is

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(10) A.H. Armstrong (trans.), Plotinus Vol IV, p.397. Stephen MacKenna (trans.), Plotinus The Enneads, p.334.

excluded. Whether this portrait of opposition simply reflects a form of selective argumentation on the part of St. Thomas where he wants to emphasise the wholly non - sensory character of beatific knowledge is difficult to say. Certainly, he will later suggest in De Ver.13.3 & 4 that this results in a conflict of interests between mind and senses and a competitiveness between them that is resolved during rapture in favour of the intellect at the expense of sensory activity which is thereby suspended. It is divine assistance which makes this possible and enables human beings to withdraw beyond sensory experience so that their way of understanding is altered (De Ver.13.1). This brings about a more concentrated and exclusive form of attention to what is intelligible and, in particular, to the essence of God.

Aquinas was also very aware that not all noetic out of body states were identical with rapture as he understood it even though they might replicate its features in some ways. In De Veritate 13.1, he notes that insanity or mental derangement can induce personal states in which the mind seems to be detached from the senses. It is interesting to observe that Aquinas' views on this issue may have anticipated by some seven centuries certain contemporary psychiatric theories. R.D. Laing, for example, was convinced that schizophrenic patients had highly developed powers of intuition and experienced mental states of profound

enlightenment though they might depict these in obscure or metaphorical language or symbolically through bizarre behaviour (10). It is also perhaps of interest to note that in Irish folklore a person who was mentally deranged was sometimes known as "duine le dia" which literally means someone who is with God. In addition, Aquinas knew that certain herbs had natural powers "to release the mind from the senses, so that wonderful visions are beheld" (11). In S.T.II-II.175.1, he identifies two further kinds of states which replicate rapture. The first of these includes conditions such as bodily infirmities where some abstraction from the senses can ocur. What Aquinas seems to have in mind here are states of weakness or of feeling faint where some form of being "light - headed" occurs (12). Presumably this category might also include epilepsy, senility and the extremely debilitating conditions of serious illness or even

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(10) R.D. Laing, The Divided Self (Middlesex : Penguin Books Ltd., 1965) ; Self and Others (Middlesex : Penguin Books Ltd., 1971) ; The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise (Middlesex : Penguin Books, 1967) ; The Politics of the Family and Other Essays (Middlesex : Penguin Books Ltd., 1976) ; R.D. Laing and A. Esterson, Sanity, Madness and the Family (Middlesex : Penguin Books, 1970).

(11) Cf. Objection 12 in De Ver.13.1.

(12) Cf. also S.C.G.II.81.

of very great stress as states that facilitate, at least sometimes, something akin to an "out of body" experience. Aquinas next identifies demonic possession as another factor which can simulate an experience which exhibits some of the manifestations of rapture. However, he believes that, by comparison with rapture, these other mental states do not enhance or elevate the individual concerned (non est elevatio hominis) as the rapturous vision of God does but rather have a depressing effect on the human being (sed potius depressio). He claims in De Veritate 13.1 ad 12 that these spurious forms of transcendence are achieved by deadening and stupifying the senses (nisi inquantum obstupefaciunt sensus) although how this differs so much from the suspension of the sensory activities in rapture may be somewhat difficult to pinpoint, at least from an external point of view.

This, of course, raises the interesting question as to what precise kind of criteria, whether external and internal, can enable us to distinguish between genuine and spurious experiences of rapture. How can we tell the difference, for instance, between the genuine religious mystic and the paranoid schizophrenic, both of whom are convinced that they have heard the voice of God ? Unfortunately, Aquinas is not very forthcoming on this point apart from insisting that genuine rapture is involuntary and leads to God (S.T.II-II.175.1). It might be argued, however,

that some kind of choice is involved, at least with regards to selecting conditions that might facilitate a mystical experience such as deciding to live in a monastic settlement or to recite a devotional mantra. There is also the suggestion in Aquinas' account that a genuine experience of rapture is in some way internally self - authenticated which really amounts to claiming that one can be certain of knowing when one hears the authentic voice of God. This intuitive self - assurance, which rather smacks of Platonism (and is also later found in Cartesianism), appears to be the only other criterion on offer. In defence of Aquinas' view, however, one might ask how else could there be any guarantee of the authenticity of an experience which is necessarily so intimately personal and enigmatic ? Nonetheless, a difficulty exists in relation to determining what counts as a mystical experience of the kind described.

4.3. Paul's Rapturous Vision of God's Essence

The issue which Aquinas sets out to investigate in De Ver.13.2 and S.T.II-II.175.3 is whether Paul actually saw God's essence when enraptured. However, from a more general point of view, the question that is being posed here is whether it is possible for anyone to know God directly before death and without the mediation of the senses in a way which is similar to the post - mortem beatific vision of God. There is also the more fundamental and implied

assumption that the mind still continues to think when independent of the sensory powers. Most of the objections in De Ver.13.2 concentrate on the implications arising from the beatific vision by suggesting that if Paul had really seen God, this would inevitably have left long - term and clearly observable effects. The first, third and fourth objections deny that Paul could have seen God on the grounds that his body was not glorified. The point being made here is that the vision of God must have enhancing consequences for the body, a view that is expressed elsewhere by Aquinas in S.T.I-II.4.5 & 6 about the human body in the resurrected state. The second, seventh and eighth objections also deny that Paul could have had some kind of temporary beatific vision. The sixth objection is particularly noteworthy because it denies that Paul could have seen God while alive and therefore united in soul and body (13). In addition, there are the four objections outlined in S.T.II-II.175.3, the first and fourth of which suggest that Paul must have had an imaginary vision. The second bluntly states that if Paul had seen God, he would never have returned to the unhappiness of this life. These represent

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(13) I have omitted Objection 5 and Aquinas' reply which concerns whether Paul had faith and hope while enraptured. Cf. also Objection 3 and the response in S.T.II-II.175.3.

some formidable difficulties which Aquinas must somehow try to resolve.

It is clear from the "sed contra's" in both texts that Thomas is again relying heavily on Augustine's authority to justify his own assumption that Paul must have seen God and he continues to invoke Augustine's support in the corpus of the relevant articles. He rejects the possibility in De Ver.13.2 that Paul merely had some kind of intermediate vision of God, which was neither fully beatific, on the one hand, nor based on purely natural knowledge, on the other. He then speculates as to whether Paul might have had some innate knowledge of God similar to an angelic intuition and it is interesting that he refers at this point to Liber de Causis in which Prop. VII states that an intelligence knows what is both superior and inferior to it. The question is if Paul, for example, by considering his own essence as an intelligible likeness of God, somehow came to know what God is through an intelligible form in which God is seen by means of some intelligible light in the mind. Aquinas rejects this on the grounds that the human intellect cannot naturally know God in this way. He reaffirms that the natural knowledge of this life occurs through what he calls the mirror and obscurity of sensory creatures (per speculum et aenigma sensibilium creaturarum) whereas the knowledge of God through the divine essence is only natural to God alone.

Most of the remainder of De Ver.13.2 is taken up with

Aquinas' explanation of how Paul's beatitude is qualified or limited in certain respects. This means that it lasts for a time and then passes and, apart from the sensory activities being suspended, the body does not seem to be otherwise affected. This rather strange notion is contested by virtually all the objections in De Ver.13.2 and S.T.II-II.175.3. These deny the possibility that any limited form of beatitude could occur and insist that the vision of God must be unrestricted and unqualified. Aquinas uses the metaphor of sunlight to counteract these claims. He compares the beatific knowledge of God after death to sunlight which he maintains can permanently abide in certain things like the stars or precious stones as though it were connatural to them. Rapture, on the other hand, is like a ray of sunlight that passes through the air and disappears when the sun departs. It is clear what Aquinas wants to say from this example but it still does not satisfactorily explain how the vision of God can be restricted in rapture in the way he thinks. There is a clue available however in his response in S.T.I-II.4.6 ad 3 which throws some light on this issue. The objection to which Aquinas is replying here takes up a point earlier made by himself concerning how a more perfect form of understanding occurs in proportion to the degree of bodily abstraction involved. The point of the objection is that since beatific happiness is purely intellectual in character, no bodily disposition is necessary. Aquinas'

reply is interesting because of the distinction he makes between what he calls the corruptible and incorruptible body. It is true, he admits, that a condition for perfect mental functioning requires abstraction from this corruptible body that weighs heavily upon the soul (14). However, such abstraction is unnecessary in relation to the spiritual body that is wholly subject to the soul. If we apply this principle to the issue of why beatified knowledge is restricted in rapture, we are led to conclude that it is because the human body is corruptible before death. We are also told in De Ver.13.3 ad 4 that the vision of rapture does not occur in the memory, which is linked to the sensory faculties, but takes place in the intellect itself, a conclusion which may help to explain why Paul had some difficulty in recalling the exact details of his experience. In De Ver.13.5 ad 6, Aquinas summarises his view of what occurred by saying that Paul did not see all that the beatified see, especially after the resurrection.

The responses to the objections in De Veritate 13.2 and in S.T.II-II.175.3 indicate that Aquinas is satisfied that they have been answered by what he has said in the main part

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(14) The text reads : "dicendum, quod ad perfectam operationem intellectus reequiritur quidem abstractio ab hoc corruptibili corpore, quod aggravat animam .."

(S.T.I-II.4.6 ad 3)

of the articles in question about rapture's limitations, although he replies in some detail to a number of them. It is also worth noting that he does not equate a prophetic experience with that of rapture since the former does not involve seeing the essence of God (S.T.II-II.173.1). Aquinas also maintains in S.T.II-II.175.3 ad 2 that like rapture, the effects of prophecy do not overflow into the body except in a very restricted way.

However, all this being said, the Thomistic account remains unsatisfactory on a number of points and this becomes particularly obvious when we recall what Aquinas said in S.C.G.IV.92 about how the mind becomes so totally engrossed in the beatific vision that the will is forever fixated on God. How then can rapture be understood as a passing phenomenon which does not permanently determine the will towards God, since it seems that when the experience is over, enraptured individuals are free to act as they wish ? It is also worth recalling what Aquinas said in S.T.I.94.1 in the course of dismissing the possibility that human beings before original sin had seen God's essence. He rejects this view on the grounds that no one could turn away from God having had such beatific knowledge. It seems then that Aquinas' theory of restricted beatitude poses certain problems, not the least of which is the difficulty associated with the nature of the Pauline report. Apart from the uncertain impression it leaves as regards what actually

transpired concerning whether Paul saw God's essence at all, there is the question of whether one can have an experience which is impossible or certainly very difficult to describe. This, however, appears to be one of the problems associated with reports of mystic experiences and occurs in Plotinus' account of his ecstasy in Enn.IV.8.1. It may indeed be derived from the nature of human language which does not have the capacity to adequately express many of our deepest feelings and thoughts. Wittgenstein mentions this problem in Prop.6.522 of his Tractatus Logico - Philosophicus where he accepts that some things just cannot be put into words (15). He defines these entities as mystical and suggests in the final sentence of the text that : "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence." (16)
If these views are applied to reports of ineffable experiences, such as those of St. Paul and Plotinus discussed above, it is possible to argue that it is the limitations of human language that make it very difficult to describe just what has occurred. Whatever about this, the problems that are evident in Aquinas' account do not detract from the importance of his theory as a way of speculating

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(15) D.F. Pears & B.F. McGuinness (trans.), Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico - Philosophicus (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul,1961), p.73.

(16) Ibid., p.74.

about how God's essence might be seen by embodied human beings after death and in the state of resurrection.

4.4. The Withdrawal of the Mind in Rapture

Aquinas assumes from the outset that, in rapture, there is some sort of mental withdrawal from the sensory powers. On the one hand, he insists that he is not referring to the kind of intellectual abstraction that might be attributed to someone whose mind is wandering (S.T.II-II.175.1). On the other hand, neither can the state of withdrawal reflect the absolute separation of soul from body which is associated with death (S.T.II-II.175.5). Somewhere between these two extremes, the human mind can function by itself in rapture independently of the senses, according to the analysis provided in De Veritate 13.3 & 4 and in S.T.II-II.175.4 & 5. The assumption which underlies this is that which has been mentioned throughout this present work, namely that the mind can act either in conjunction with or independently of the senses depending on whether the soul is embodied or not. The peculiar character of rapture, however, is that knowledge is obtained independently of the senses in life before death.

Before considering Aquinas' presentation in the main part of De Ver.13.3, it is worth noting the Platonism that occurs in the sixth "sed contra" of Article 3. Here, Aquinas states, in the course of declaring that the greatest cleanliness of heart is necessary in order to see God, that

the heart may be soiled in two ways, by being contaminated by sin and by the material sensory images :

"Sed cor dupliciter immundatur : scilicet contaminatione peccati, et materialibus phantasiis."

The Platonism here is suggested by the notion that sensory images can contaminate the mind and this theme is continued in Aquinas' treatment where he emphasises the negative influence that the senses have on the intellect according as he develops his theory on the technical aspects of rapture.

He begins his discussion in De Veritate 13.3 by reiterating that the relationship between the mental and sensory powers is such that if the activity of one kind of power becomes very intense, the activity of the other power will be correspondingly weakened or even wholly suppressed. He gives the example of someone completely engrossed in watching something and as a result does not hear what is being said. There are echoes here of Phaedo 66B-67D which also depicts the kind of relationship that exists between the soul and the body as one that is always on the verge of tilting in favour of either soul or body and what they represent. Plato's text reminds us that an exclusive concern with bodily things will reduce the amount of attention needed for the things of the spirit. Socrates' welcome for death in The Phaedo is precisely because it facilitates the unimpeded understanding of truth by releasing soul from body. The message for life before death

is an exhortation to become detached as much as possible from bodily concerns so that this kind of purification will bring about the appropriate disposition for wisdom within us (17). It is not reading too much into Aquinas' enthusiasm for non - sensory knowledge generally to suggest that there is a definite sharing of viewpoints on this issue between himself and Plato. This is confirmed by Aquinas' astute use of Augustinian thought to support his claims in De Ver.13.3 and he goes on to say in the same context that no one can attend to a number of things all at once unless there is some unifying centre which holds them all together. It is the soul which performs this unifying task in human life, a point also made in the boundary reference to the soul's powers in S.T.I.77.2, as was mentioned in the previous chapter. Rapture is therefore depicted as occurring in a state of imbalance where the mind must act independently and at the expense of the senses in order to see God. Since God is the most intensely intelligible object (cum hoc sit vehentissimum intelligibile) towards Whom one's whole mental attention must be totally directed, such mental detachment is crucial:

> But for the understanding to be raised up to the vision of the divine essence, the whole attention must be concentrated on this vision,

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(17) Phaedo 67AB.

since this is the most intensely intelligible object, and the understanding can reach it only by striving for it with a total effort. Therefore, it is necessary to have complete abstraction from the bodily senses when the mind is raised to the vision of God. (De Ver.13.3)

The second reason for the mental withdrawal from the senses, according to Aquinas, is because we know things in so far as they are actual rather than potential. He interprets this to mean that the mind deals best with immaterial realities which, in his view, are the greatest in act (quae sunt maxime in actu). Every intelligible thing is either free from matter or separated from it by mental abstraction and Aquinas again concludes rather Platonically that the mind is more perfect, the more purified it is from contact with material things. This leads him to say that because it depends on the phantasms or the potentially intelligible sensory images, the human intellect is less efficacious than that of an angelic intelligence which directly relates to purely immaterial forms. Aquinas concludes :

Nevertheless, in so far as the purity of intellectual knowledge is not wholly obscured in human understanding, as happens in the senses whose knowledge cannot go beyond material things, it has the power to consider things which are

purely immaterial by the very fact that it retains some purity.

Therefore, if it is ever raised beyond its ordinary level to see the highest of immaterial things, namely the divine essence, it must be wholly cut off from the sight of material things at least during that act. Hence, since the sensitive powers can deal only with material things, one cannot be raised to vision of the divine essence unless he is wholly deprived of the use of the bodily senses. (De Ver.13.1)

Once again, it is his Platonism rather than his use of Aristotelianism that enables Aquinas to explain the mind's withdrawal from the senses in rapture. This is also evident in his reply to the first objection. Here he refers to the mind's defilement (impuritas intellectus) because of its union with the body before death. However, mental purity will be restored after death and the body will be glorified when it is totally ruled by the soul after the resurrection. Human bodies will then be transformed into spiritualised bodies and will consequently be suitably enhanced by the overflow of happiness from the beatified soul.

The discussion on the issue of the mental withdrawal from the senses in S.T.II-II.175.4 is much more condensed and is explicitly concerned with Paul's experience. Here,

Aquinas simply rejects the possibility that God's essence can be known by means of the imagination, which implies that the mind must be withdrawn from sensory experience in order to see God.

These articles are followed by an enquiry into what such a form of mental withdrawal might possibly mean. All the objections in both De Veritate 13.4 and S.T.II-II.175.5 suggest that this withdrawal must involve a complete separation of soul from body. If this were true, it would undermine the credibility of Aquinas' position that rapture occurs in life before death. He therefore takes the view in De Ver.13.4 that, while there is a radical separation of mind and senses in rapture, this does not involve a complete separation of soul from body. The sensory powers remain in place, although suspended, and the body continues to function biologically, though in a more modified way. Aquinas again justifies his belief in rapture by citing the support of St. Augustine and also St. Gregory and he then goes on to expand on what he thinks happens to the human being during this experience. From a negative point of view, anything that would impede the very intense degree of intellectual activity necessary for rapture must be removed. He again identifies the source of such potential interference in the activities of the senses. The actions of sense and intellect impede each other, he repeats, because of the attention that is required for both and because the

intellect somehow enters into the sensory activities since it must receive data from the phantasms or sensory images. He qualifies this by insisting that, since the soul is the form of the body, no attention is needed to sustain the union of soul and body since this does not depend on the soul's will but on its very nature. Intellectual purity is therefore not directly contaminated by this union. Aquinas here seems to be trying to avoid an extreme form of Platonism, perhaps to protect his model of the ideal relationship which should hold between the beatified soul and its glorified body. He concludes :

> From this it is clear that the powers of our understanding do not proceed from the essence of the soul in so far as it is united to the body, but rather in so far as it stays free of the body and is not entirely bound down to it (non totaliter subjugata). In this sense the union of soul and body does not extend to the activity of the understanding and so cannot interfere with its purity. Hence, when we consider what is intrinsic to the acts, the dissolution of the union by which the soul is united to the body as its form is not a necessary condition of the understanding no matter how intense. (De Ver.13.4).

By contrast with the sensory activities, the vegetative activities of growth and nutrition do not need to be

suppressed, according to Aquinas. These occur naturally and spontaneously in human life and do not consequently require any specific attention to sustain them. They do not interfere, he claims, with mental activity which does not depend on them directly in the same way as it does on the senses to provide sensory images. However, Aquinas suggests that they may exercise an indirect influence on the mind since they nourish and sustain the sensory powers. We can appreciate Thomas' point here by considering the effects of vitamin deficiency or malnutrition on sensory activities and ultimately on the capacity of the mind to function as a result. The examples Aquinas himself provides are those of sleeping and eating, by which he is presumably thinking of how they can make the mind sluggish. He also suggests that intellectual activity may indirectly interfere with the imagination, which is normally required for knowledge, during an intense experience of contemplating God. This might also affect some bodily changes that are vegetative in character, according to Thomas. What seems to be suggested here is that during periods of extremely intense thinking, when the need for the imagination is reduced or perhaps totally dispensed with, as in rapture, the nutritive and growth processes may be correspondingly affected and their level of activity altered or reduced as a result. It might be interesting, perhaps, under laboratory conditions to try to verify this hypothesis in the case of someone thought to

be undergoing a mystic experience. Aquinas' conclusion in De Ver.13.4 is that the mind need not be abstracted from the vegetative processes when seeing God in rapture nor do these processes need to be restricted in any way, by being suspended, for example, for rapture to occur. All that is required is the mind's abstraction from sensory activities. These issues are discussed much more briefly in S.T.II-II.175.5 and much in the same way as in De Veritate 13.4. However, Aquinas is careful to remind us in Summa Theologica that the soul in rapture still retains its intellectual disposition to act through the senses although it cannot do so during the experience. The article itself briefly explains that it is logical that the mind must act independently of the senses in rapture but avoids the kind of detail given by its counterpart in De Veritate.

There are clearly some points here which require comment. First, it has to be said that Aquinas' basic argument for the mind's withdrawal from the senses whose activities are simultaneously suspended is a logical one given his assumption that rapture occurs and involves seeing God. However, some questions remain both in relation to rapture and its implications for the resurrection of the body. It is not a sufficient explanation, for example, for Aquinas to say, as in S.T.II-II.175.5 ad 2, that what occurs in rapture by God's power is similar to what happens when a body which is lifted up by a power greater than

itself from the place in which it is naturally located. Another question concerns whether the enraptured person has any feeling, sight, hearing, taste or sense of smell while the experience is occurring. There are also implications here for bodily resurrection. If the senses are suspended in the latter state since they are required for seeing God, do they remain in some kind of permanent suspension, put on hold, as it were, for all eternity ? It is also difficult to envisage any role for the vegetative processes in this state. Are they abolished or suspended or are we to think that the digestive and eliminative processes somehow continue to function ? One recalls, for example, in connection with the latter, the report in The Gospel of St. Luke 24.41-43 that, Jesus, after the resurrection, was capable of eating grilled fish. All that can be determined for sure from a Thomistic standpoint is that, in the beatific state both of rapture and of post - resurrection beatitude, the mind continues to function at its best by attending intensely to what God is in the realm of pure thought and intelligibility.

4.5. Self - Knowledge in Rapture

It is obviously of interest to investigate whether the enraptured person is aware of what is happening during the experience and how much, if any, of the latter can be recalled. Aquinas addresses this matter in De Veritate 13.5

and S.T.II-II.175.6. The issue is personified in the case of Paul as both articles enquire as to whether he knew that his soul was in or out of the body during rapture. The text itself of 2 Corinthians 12, 2-4 twice explicitly states that Paul did not know whether he was "in the body or out of it" and Aquinas accepts that this must have been the case. As mentioned earlier, Paul's report is in stark contrast, to Plotinus' description of his experience Enn.IV.8.1. In the latter situation, Plotinus claims to have been very aware that his experience was an out of body one and he was also subsequently able to recall what occurred in some detail after coming down, as he puts it, to discursive reasoning and to his normal bodily state. It is also evident from his report that Plotinus thought that his soul could function in a separate way by itself "even when it is in the body" (in a mystic state, presumably) although the mechanism by which this could happen again remains unclear (18). Paul, on the other hand, while claiming to have been 'caught up... right into the third heaven' and to have had visions and revelations of things inaccessible to human thought and language, is quite confused about the exact nature of what occurred to him during the period in question. When addressing this issue in De Veritate 13.5, Aquinas accepts Paul's own version of events, as was noted earlier, and

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(18) Enn.IV.8.1.

maintains that though Paul knew that he was transported in mind 'in illud coelum', he was uncertain as to whether or not his soul was in the body during this period. Neither was he subsequently able, as has been mentioned, to clarify this as Plotinus apparently was able to do. Thomas' reply in S.T.II-II.175.6 follows a similar route to that of De Ver.13.5 except that in Summa Theologica he claims that it was Paul's lack of interest in his state of soul - body unity that made him ignorant as to whether he was in the body or not during his experience. At the same time, Aquinas is again careful to state that Paul's soul was not wholly separated from the body and that his confusion was simply a function of his state of consciousness since his body and soul were in fact united.

4.6. Some Concluding Remarks

Despite his intriguing analysis, it is clear that, in addition to some of the difficulties mentioned here, the principal issue is one of credibility, namely, whether it is humanly possible before death for anyone, including St. Paul, to see the essence of God as distinct from having some other kind of ineffable vision of a transcendent dimension. If we accept that the former possibility exists, as St. Thomas did, especially in the case of St. Paul, then we are confronted with the need to explain this from a

psychological and epistemological point of view and, in this regard, the approach adopted by Aquinas seems plausible in many ways, despite the problems that it raises. However, even if one doubts, for whatever reasons, that such a vision of God before death is possible, it still remains an interesting fact that, given his preference for Aristotle, Aquinas was confronted with the limitations of Aristotelianism with regards to its abilty to account for his conviction that such a non - sensory form of rapturous knowledge exists. It is also noteworthy that Aquinas feels compelled to explain such knowledge by means of propositions and insights which are strongly associated with the tradition of Platonism. Here, as in related contexts elsewhere, it seems as if the boundary image of the soul and of human existence described in the last chapter is once again being implicitly employed to account for the underlying human structure that enables people to attain such knowledge. The reference to the mind's withdrawal in ecstasy in connection with the boundary metaphor described in S.C.G.II.81 is one such confirmation of this. It is ultimately a tribute to the logic of Aquinas' position as regards his belief that it is possible to see the essence of God which made him embark, seemingly against all his philosophical instincts, on an explanation of non - sensory based knowledge which is virtually Platonic in character. What is also important about the Thomistic account is that

it allows Aquinas to explore the kind of mechanisms which he thought applied in some way to the beatific vision of God in the resurrection. However, he was also careful to state that rapture itself is limited as a way of seeing God even though it represents the highest level of contemplation available before death. In a passage from S.T.II-II.180.5, he identifies rapture as an intermediate state which some people, like St. Paul, experience before death and concludes as follows:

> Consequently the highest degree of contemplation in the present life is that which Paul had in rapture, whereby he was in a middle state between the present life and the life to come.

This intermediate state anticipates the non - sensory knowledge of God which is available in principle to all during the beatific vision after death.

Chapter 5

Some Aspects of the Beatific Vision

5.1. Human Bodiliness and the Beatific Vision

In the last chapter, it was stated that the kinds of mechanisms which operate during the experience of rapture anticipate to some extent what occurs during the beatific vision of the resurrection. Indeed Aquinas seems to say much more in his account of rapture about what happens with regards to how the mental and physical processes are affected in beatitude than he does in his treatment of the beatific vision itself. Bertrand Russell claimed that St. Thomas said almost nothing on the latter and there is some point to this observation (1). Beatitude, as was earlier mentioned, essentially relates to the mind rather than to the body and can therefore occur when the body is no longer present, which is the case immediately after death. However, as a Christian, St. Thomas has also to explain the bodily consequences of the beatific vision of the resurrection. This he does by distinguishing between the corruptible state of bodiliness which applied before death (and also in rapture) from the incorruptible body of the resurrection about which he says so much in Summa Contra Gentiles, Book IV. Aquinas argues in S.C.G.IV.81 that neither the formal nor material human principles are

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(1) Bertrand Russell, History of Western Philosophy, p.451.

annihilated with death because the soul is immortal and therefore incorruptible and since "the matter....which was subject to that form remains under the same dimensions that individualised it." Whatever about the continued survival of the soul, the latter claim is somewhat puzzling since it suggests some kind of relationship between the soul and its matter even when the body is dissolved by death. This, however, according to Aquinas, is the philosophical reason why soul and body can be reunited in the resurrection, in which he as a Christian theologian believes. The result of this reunification is a new bodily disposition which involves incorruptibility and is a consequence of God's restorative power, according to S.C.G.IV.85. However, human nature remains the same in this new state and even though the human body does not require food nor sexual activity (S.C.G.IV.83), it is not transformed into a spiritual substance but has configuration and is tactile (S.C.G.IV.84). All these claims make it difficult to know what kind of body Aquinas thinks is present in the resurrection, especially since the beatific state presumably occurs in a locus which is essentially non - sensory in nature.

However, while important in themselves, such considerations do not impinge on the non - sensory character of human cognition in relation to the beatific vision. They do pose questions, though, as regards the role

of the sensory powers and the vegetative processes while the latter is taking place. Are the senses, for example, permanently deprived of any future role in human experience, given that they cannot now contribute to the noetic process which is wholly non - sensory in the state of resurrection ? In addition, although Aquinas describes the resurrected body as tactile, this merely designates its aspect of animality for him and thereby signifies the existence of human nature in the resurrected human being. Sexual relationships are also dispensed with in this state, as was earlier mentioned, because, according to Aquinas, their main purpose is the generation of the human species and this is at an end at the stage of resurrection (S.C.G.IV.83). Food is also unnecessary at that point, he claims in the same chapter, since it serves the purpose of human growth which again is a process that ceases in the resurrection since human beings "will rise again of the size that is due to them".

These conclusions would suggest that there is little point to human bodiliness in the resurrection except as a defining mark of the human presence, as stated in S.T.I-II.4.5 & 6. The body's lack of a more active role, as it had before death, also marks a new difference in the relationship between intellect and senses. The mind, which before death, struggled for clarity of knowledge and certainty, is now intensely engaged at the most sublime level of cognition with the greatest of all intelligible

objects, God's essence itself. The body and its processes become correspondingly less important although necessary to signify that beatitude is still a human encounter with God. These elements are somewhat reminiscent of the struggle between the mind and the senses in rapture which is resolved in the intellectual freedom to know God independently of sensory experience. It is difficult not to think that such Thomistic sentiments amount to a devaluation of the body and suggest that what Aquinas really wants to say is that the soul can get on quite well without the body and can effectively ignore its own embodiment. Perhaps, it might be fairer to St. Thomas to conclude that he was simply unable to establish a more convincing case for human embodiment in the resurrection despite his belief that the body is indispensible to mark the human significance of the encounter. What is certainly clear is that, unlike rapture, there appears to be a more positive perception of the body's presence in its attunement to the soul's orientation to God as compared with the subtraction of the body, as it were, which is associated with the state of rapture (S.C.G.IV.86).

There is the additional point that, unlike rapture, the beatific vision is not temporary nor restricted to a few special people but is eternal and the preordained destiny of all who live a good life. It goes without saying that Aquinas' views are necessarily speculative and shaped by his Christian beliefs. The interesting point, from a

philosophical perspective, is that despite his declared preference for the views of Aristotle, Aquinas' position is that the most sublime form of cognition occurs when the mind is wholly free of the senses. This holds true in spite of all that he writes about the desirability of the human body being present during the beatific experience.

5.2. Beatific Contemplation and Divine Enlightenment

Since, according to Aquinas, it is the life of contemplation that fundamentally aims at reflecting on divine truth and seeing God "face to face" (S.T.II-II.180.4), it is in terms of a contemplative vision that our ultimate happiness is attained (2). There is beauty in the contemplative life "by its very nature and essence", states St. Thomas in S.T.II-II.180.2 ad 3 and the beatific vision occurs by contemplating the purity of intelligible truth (S.T.II-II.180.5 ad 2). He contrasts beatific contemplation with the contemplation of the truth that is available in this life and concludes that :

> In this life there is nothing so like this ultimate and perfect happiness as the life of those who contemplate the truth, as far as is possible here below. Hence the philosophers who were unable to obtain full knowledge of that final beatitude, placed man's ultimate happiness

(2) S.C.G.III.37.

in that contemplation which is possible during this life. (S.C.G.III.63)

Aquinas sees support for this conclusion in the Scriptures and he observes that the contemplation of the truth, which begins in this life, will be consummated in life after death. This is a view which has a definite Platonic resonance. In S.T.II-II.180.5, St. Thomas reiterates the same view as is put forward in the above extract from Summa Contra Gentiles Book III. In Article 5, he asks whether the practice of contemplation in present life can enable one to see the divine essence. He rejects this possibility on the grounds that the present state of union between soul and body results in the mind's use of the senses and imagination. Since God, as an immaterial being. essentially transcends these, Thomas concludes, as was mentioned earlier, that the mind's most sublime way of attaining to God in this life is through the qualified form of beatitude that occurs in rapture. He identifies the latter as an intermediate state between life at present and "the life to come". In his study of Aquinas, David Burrell analyses the Thomistic perception of contemplation and concludes that it is an energised state which frees us from time and space and resolves impasses by allowing hitherto incompatible horizons to merge. Burrell links contemplation to seeing in this way :

> In Aquinas' terms, it is fitting that the act of contemplating what lies beyond our capacity to articulate makes contact, in its simplicity, with the initial act of understanding which must precede any articulation : the spontaneous 'I see'. This process of articulation between the two comprises the better part of a lifetime, and makes demands of consistency in word and deed that go to fill the ensuing silence. (3)

Aquinas' analysis in S.C.G.III.37 of the conditions that faciliate contemplation is consistent with his claim that the most sublime knowledge of God is non - sensory in character. Contemplation of the truth, he insists, requires freedom and safety from the body, rest from the disturbance of the passions and respite from the external turmoil of civic life. Aquinas' language here again contains echoes of Phaedo 65E-67D which similarly identifies these kinds of negative bodily factors as impediments to the soul's search for true knowledge. The adverse elements noted by Aquinas, which generally seem to relate to bodily being, must be eliminated, he suggests, if the wisdom and happiness based on the consideration of divine reality is to be achieved. He therefore insists that the only way that the mind

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(3) David B. Burrell, Aquinas, God and Action (London : Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p.174.

can see God is by being detached from sensory things and he claims in S.C.G.III.47 that, even if Sacred Scripture were to state otherwise, it would be mistaken, since no imaginary or bodily vision can represent God's essence. This again means that it is only after death that such a vision becomes possible (4). Aquinas reaches the same conclusion in Summa Theologica Part I Question 12 where he discusses how God can be known to us. He insists here that God cannot be seen by means of the imagination (S.T.I.12.2), nor with bodily eyes (S.T.I.12.3), nor by the natural power of any finite intellect (S.T.I.12.4). He concludes once again that the mind must be divinely enlightened in order to see the essence of God.

In S.C.G.III.51, Aquinas describes what this vision involves in a way which is reminiscent of the account of beauty given in Symposium 211AB :

> It would be impious to understand (this immediate vision of God) in a material way, and imagine a material face in the Godhead : since we have proved that God has no body. Nor is it possible for us to see God with a bodily face since the eyes of the body are situated in the face, can only see bodily things. (S.C.G.III.51)

Instead, he adds, God is seen in the beatific vision in a

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(4) S.C.G.III.48.

way which is analogous to meeting someone face to face and it is in terms of this vision that we become most like God and "participators of His bliss". There is an interesting passage in Plotinus' writings concerning the final ineffable encounter of the soul, which, to some extent, anticipates the kinds of sentiments expressed by Aquinas :

> the soul then has another life and draws near and has already come near and has a part in him, and so is in a state to know that the giver of true life is present and we need nothing more. But quite otherwise, we must put away other things and take our stand only in this, and become this alone, cutting away all the other things in which we are encased ; so we must be eager to go out from here and be impatient at being bound to the other things, that we may embrace him with the whole of ourselves and have no part with which we do not touch God. There one can see both him and oneself as it is right to see : the self glorified, full of intelligible light - but rather itself pure light - weightless, floating free ... (Enn.VI.9.9)

It is interesting to see how a number of these themes emerge again in the Thomistic treatment of beatitude. Plotinus, of course, is also following in the tradition of Plato's Phaedo in his emphasis on the need for the soul to

separate itself from whatever restricts its access to God. He makes a special point of mentioning this in Enn.VI.9.10 where he describes the ultimate vision as continuous "since there will be no longer any hindrance by the body", something which is also said by Aquinas in S.C.G.III.62.

For Aquinas, the mechanism by which the vision of God's essence ocurs is through the supernatural infusion of the divine likeness revealed by a divine enlightenment of the mind. He begins from the following premiss :

> "Wherefore if God's essence be seen at all, it must be that the intellect sees it in the divine essence itself : so that in that vision the divine essence is both the object and the medium of vision. (S.C.G.III.51)

The difficulty with this, as St. Thomas acknowledges, lies precisely in its claim that God's essence can somehow exist in the human mind in the form of an intelligible likeness. The theoretical background here is the Thomistic theory that knowledge occurs by means of some intelligible likeness in the mind. Understanding therefore involves a process whereby the intellect so acts in conjunction with the senses that it can grasp the intelligible likeness that is derived from the imagination. The difficulty of having God as the intelligible object, which cannot in any way be mediated through the imagination, concerns the implication that the infinite likeness of God can be contained in the created

human mind, a notion which would seem to be contradictory. Aquinas thinks that he can resolve this dilemma by arguing that, since what the mind seeks is truth, and since God represents the ultimate truth that perfects the mind, it is not inconsistent with the divine essence to constitute an intelligible likeness for the human mind. This is also a unique process, adds St. Thomas, and results in perfecting one's capacity for understanding. All of these notions are contained in the passage from S.C.G.III.51 quoted earlier, namely, that the human mind sees God in the divine essence itself where the latter is both the medium and the object of knowledge. This is because everything about God is wholly identical with God which means that God is the divine likeness (6). The implications of this Thomistic conclusion are quite clearly momentous, if also baffling, and once again reflect the logic of Aquinas' conviction that the natural desire to see God can be supernaturally attained (6). Aquinas appears to have been satisfied that his conclusion protected divine transcendence (since we can never know all that can be known about God) while allowing the possibility that the human mind could see God in the beatific vision. In terms of its philosophical implications, however, his view once again demonstrates the primacy of

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(5) Cf. also S.T.I.12.9.

(6) S.T.I.12.1 and Lonergan's paradox in Ch.2 Section 2.1.

non - sensory knowledge at this, the highest level of theological knowledge, where God's essence is seen through the immaterial medium of the divinity itself.

In S.C.G.III.53, St. Thomas describes in some detail the means by which God's likeness becomes clear to the human mind by the mechanism of a supernatural enlightenment brought about by the goodness of God. It is this divine light that produces the new mental disposition which is depicted in Chapter 53. St. Thomas situates his explanation in the context of claiming that sight is "the highest and most spiritual (of the senses), and therefore most akin to the intellect". It is therefore appropriate, he states, to use the metaphor of sight for intellectual knowledge. However, just as sight requires light in order to see, so does the intellect require a divine enlightenment in order to see God :

> Accordingly the disposition whereby the created intellect is raised to the intellectual vision of the divine substance, is rightly called the <u>light of glory</u> (lux gloriae) : not that it makes the object actually intelligible, as the light of the active intellect does ; but it makes the intellect actually able to understand. (S.C.G.III.53)

The reference here to the active intellect refers to Aristotle and the distinction that Aquinas introduces may be taken to mean that, although no finite mind can render God

intelligible, God can be cognised in the intellect's vision of the divine essence.

Aquinas' concept of a divine enlightenment is also expressed elsewhere in his writings and serves as an important metaphor for depicting the mental disposition which elevates the human mind to see God (7). Despite his reference to Aristotle in S.C.G.III.53, Aquinas' use of the images of sight and light are also strongly reminiscent of Platonism (8).

5.3. The Effects of Beatitude

St. Thomas describes some of the effects of the beatific vision in Summa Contra Gentiles Book III and among the first of these is his claim that every human mind, irrespective of intellectual ability, can see God :

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(7) S.C.G.III.53, S.T.I.12.5, 89.1 ad 3. Rahner describes divine illumination as a "somewhat convenient conceptual and verbal tool that makes it easy for (Aquinas) to say briefly what he wants to say." Cf. Karl Rahner, "Thomas Aquinas on the Incomprehensibility of God" in David Tracy (ed.), Celebrating the Medieval Heritage, The Journal of Religion, Vol 58, Supplement, 1978, pp.S107-S125, (here, p.S110).

(8) Cf. e.g. Plato's Republic 507B-518D & Plotinus in Enn.VI.9.4, 9.9.

"... there is no created intellect of so low a degree as to its nature, that cannot be raised to this vision."

(S.C.G.III.57)

The reason for this is that no finite intellect is capable of seeing God by means of its own natural resources. Consequently, since, according to Thomas, the natural desire to see God is not in vain, this vision is divinely brought about, irrespective of one's level of intelligence.

There are, however, some differences in the way that God is seen by the beatified in that some intelligences can know God more perfectly than others, according to S.C.G.III.58. Aquinas explains this by stating that there are different levels of mentally participating in the process of divine enlightenment. He also states in S.C.G.III.59 that those who see the divine essence see all things in God. One of the reasons for this is that the beatific vision fully satisfies the mind's thirst for knowledge and sets its natural noetic desire at rest. Everything that is divinely made for the perfection of the universe will therefore be revealed in the beatific experience. However, Aquinas qualifies his statement by adding that such knowledge can never be as comprehensive as that which God possesses. The same issue is addressed in S.T.I.12.8 which explains that all things are understood better when the human mind sees God because "the more perfectly a cause is seen, the more of its effects can be

seen in it." Consequently, since God is the primary cause of all things, the beatific vision enables one to see all things in God. Another feature of beatific knowledge is that everything is known immediately since the mind sees all things "simultaneously, and not successively" (9). This knowledge also enables human beings to share in eternal life (S.C.G.III.61) and to see God forever, according to Aquinas in S.C.G.III.52. In the latter text, he devotes considerable space to establishing the conclusion that, once attained, the beatific vision cannot be removed. It is also interesting to compare his view here with what he writes elsewhere on the transitory nature of rapture. St. Thomas claims that the post - mortem state of bodily incorruptibility ensures that the human mind does not get tired of seeing God. This is because fatigue is linked with bodily factors and the present ambience of change. In a passage reminiscent of Phaedo 66B-D, he associates the state of fatigue with the effect of the activities of the sensory powers on the bodily organs during the process of sensory perception. Aquinas takes as an example the experience of gazing at a very powerful sensory object (such as a very bright light, for instance) which tires and dazzles the eyes and prevents one from enjoying what might otherwise be quite

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(9) "Unde simul, et non successive videntur." (S.T.I.12.10) Cf. also S.C.G.III.60.

visually pleasing. Analogously, he suggests, that the reason one becomes weary after long and sustained thought is because the mind uses the bodily organs, which are subject to fatigue. In the beatific vision, however, no bodily organ is noetically involved and therefore he concludes it is impossible for anyone to grow weary of God.

Thomas summarises the benefits of the beatific vision in S.C.G.III.63 by stating that every human desire is fulfilled in this experience and complete human happiness occurs as a result. The human desire for truth, which is sought in contemplative thought, is satisfied since the mind can now see God, the primary truth. All our civic needs and our ambitions for honour, glory, riches and pleasure are fulfilled because their underlying objective is completely attained in the non - sensory vision of God.

5.4. The Limitations of Beatific Knowledge

It has earlier been briefly indicated that even in the beatific vision itself, the human mind experiences certain limitations. This is because, according to Aquinas, God will always transcend the finite mind, even in this final sublime encounter. He explains this in terms of his understanding of scientia which involves the knowledge of principles and of why and what a thing is. No one can understand God fully in this way, insists Aquinas, since only God is capable of completely understanding Himself. He explains how this

knowledge is beyond us by means of a geometrical example which, interestingly, is also later used by Descartes in a related theological context (10). There are two ways of knowing that a triangle can have three angles equal to two right angles. One is by way of opinion based on probable reasoning because wise people or people generally hold that this is the case. However, this can indicate a lack of understanding by comparison with the kind of knowledge that reaches the same conclusion on the basis of knowing the geometrical principles of the theorem. Aquinas likens the latter category of scientific knowledge to the way in which God knows Himself and compares the finite mind's vision of God to the former example. God knows the principles of the divine essence (in terms of why and what it is) like the geometer understands the geometrical problem by a knowledge of geometrical principles. Our understanding, on the contrary, while being conclusive, is not scientific, in accordance with the Thomistic definition of the latter term. The implications of this distinction are described in the following passage :

> We do not however say that the divine substance is seen yet not comprehended by a created

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(10) S.C.G.III.55 & S.T.I.12.7. Cf. F.E. Sutcliffe (trans.), Descartes Discourse on Method and The Meditations (Middlesex : Penguin Books Ltd., 1968), p.57.

> intellect, as though thereof something were seen and not seen ; since the divine substance is utterly simple : but because it is not seen by the created intellect as it is visible, even as one who holds a demonstrated conclusion as an opinion is said to know it perfectly, that is scientifically, although there be no part of it that he knows not. (S.C.G.III.55)

The central idea here is that God is not seen as perfectly as He is capable of being seen nor perfectly known as He is capable of being known (11). The central divine mystery is thus exposed by the finite mind's inability to know God by scientia, which, as MacDonald observes, represents Aquinas' paradigm for knowledge (12). The comprehension of God in terms of the divine basic principles being revealed as immediate and indemonstrable eludes the finite intellect since such knowledge is exclusive to the divine mind (13). Instead, the beatific knowledge of God consists of seeing what God is rather than being able to understand fully why,

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(11) Cf. also S.T.I.12.7 ad 2.

(12) Scott MacDonald, "Theory of Knowledge" in Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (eds.), The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.160-195, (here, p.163).

(13) Ibid., p.170.

what and how God is. The mind's cognition of God thus remains limited as a consequence of divine transcendence.

Aquinas depicts this in a somewhat different way in Question 26 of Summa Theologica Part I. In the first article, he states that beatitude is a special property of God since it is characterised by perfection and intelligence. It is, he states :

"the perfect good of an intellectual nature ; which is capable of knowing that it has a sufficiency of the good which it possesses .." (S.T.I.26.1)

Aquinas adds that the beatific state denotes freedom and perfect control over one's actions. In particular, it is defined by intellect and so belongs to God in a unique way since "in God, to be and to understand are one and the same thing ; differing only in the manner of our understanding them." (S.T..26.2). Aquinas concludes that beatitude must therefore be uniquely assigned to God and he describes the divine beatific process by which God knows Himself in terms of :

"a continual and most certain contemplation of Himself and of all things .." (S.T.I.26.4)

The human mind, by comparison, cannot know everything in the way that God does (S.C.G.III.56) because God's knowledge of the principles involved, for example, in the creative process is the outcome of divine self - knowledge. Similarly, no human being can fully comprehend the power and

goodness of God nor God's will in relation to our ultimate destiny.

Commenting on what he describes as the unknowability of God, Rahner remarks that Aquinas' view on the subject "leads us into the very heights and depths of Thomistic philosophy and theology" (14). Aquinas' treatment implies that the noetic limitations of the finite mind are fundamental to the very nature of the divine - human encounter and that divine transcendence ontologically grounds every feature of this relationship. Instead of being tempted to deplore the limitations that are revealed in relation to the divine mystery, Rahner encourages us to develop a disposition which recognises the positive opportunities that are offered towards an authentic consciousness of our basic ontological and epistemological status. To accept that God is unknowable is to acknowledge that a basic statement is being made, not about God, but about human creaturehood.

Being human in the contemporary world also poses an unanswerable question in terms of the incompleteness of the human life - span, according to Rahner (15). In this connection, Gabriel Marcel once remarked that :

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(14) Karl Rahner, "Thomas Aquinas on the Incomprehensibility of God", op.cit.. p.S108.

(15) Ibid., p.S121.

"My life, in so far as already lived, is not then an unalterable deposit or a finished whole." (16)
Marcel concluded that self - fulfilment, if it is to occur at all, must take place at some other invisible level (17). Thus both Rahner and Marcel believe that human incompleteness can somehow be given a meaningful finality in a surrender to the contemplation of what is in essence the incomprehensibility of primary being.

The contemplative vision of God for Aquinas therefore represents an ultimate form of response to this primary mystery. This is the goal towards which the human mind ascends. Wittgenstein once wrote that :

> people will keep stumbling over the same
> puzzling difficulties and find themselves
> staring at something which no explanation
> seems capable of clearing up. (18)

He concluded that this satisfied the longing for the transcendent

> because in so far as people think they can see
> the "limits of human understanding", they believe

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(16) Gabriel Marcel, The Mystery of Being Vol I (South Bend, Indiana : Gateway Editions Ltd., 1950), p. xiii.

(17) Ibid., p.166.

(18) G.H. Von Wright (ed.), Ludwig Wittgenstein, Culture and Value (Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1980), p.15e.

of course that they can see beyond these.

Similarly, Aquinas claimed that human speculation and language reach their limits in trying to depict what he believed to be an ineffable terminus of knowledge. Hence the relative brevity of his own account. In his early commentary on Boethius' text on the Trinity, Aquinas had already identified the two key elements in the human noetic approach to God. The first of these he describes by stating that, although no creature moves towards God as an equal, the human mind should nevertheless strive to attain as much knowledge of God as is appropriate to its own mode of being. The second element is the response of silence when confronted with one's noetic limitations in this search :

> God is honoured by silence, but not in such a way that we may say nothing of Him or make no enquiries about Him, but inasmuch as we understand that we lack the ability to comprehend Him. (Super De Trin.2.1 ad 6)

These elements informed Aquinas' own approach to the question of how we can best come to know God. His continuous efforts to attain theological truth while recognising the ultimate limits of such efforts constitutes the paradoxical nature of the Thomistic enterprise.

Conclusion

In his study of Thomistic epistemology, MacDonald remarks that it evolved from Aquinas' metaphysical and psychological theories (1). This would certainly seem to be the case when it is recalled that, for St. Thomas, the highest form of metaphsical thought concerned God's existence and what could be said about the divine agency and causality. His theory of what it means to be human is inevitably situated within this metaphysical perspective. This led Aquinas to consider the nature of the soul and the implications of the cognitive processes. He concluded that human beings are intellectually drawn to seek out the ultimate nature of primary being. This, in turn, led to the dualistic account of how the mind can function in conjunction with and when independent of the senses and the body. Aquinas' conclusion that such independence creates a disposition for the most sublime form of theological knowledge is central to his account.

The study undertaken in this work was based on these considerations and specifically set out to show that Aquinas' theory about how we can best come to know God adopts a non - Aristotelian approach, at least as Thomas understood it. Instead, it is heavily indebted to the tradition of Platonism. It is this latter influence, for example, that shapes his views on the cognitive ascent to

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(1) Scot MacDonald, "Theory of Knowledge", op.cit., p.160

God which is described in S.C.G.IV.1. In this text, the concept of a hierarchy of being emanating from God at the summit is linked with the the three noetic phases through which the human mind must pass in order to see God. These are, in ascending order, the stages of natural theological reasoning, faith and the direct vision of God after death. Throughout this account, Aquinas is determined to portray the knowledge of God that is obtained on the basis of sensory experience as being extremely limited and even flawed. This does not seem consistent with the views of someone who declares his preference for the thinking of Aristotle over that of Plato. By contrast, it is the non - sensory knowledge of God which occurs in the beatific vision and which for Aquinas constitutes the most sublime form of noetically encountering God. In addition, there are his frequent references throughout his writings to those bodily impediments that prevent the mind's access to such a vision. These sentiments have been compared in this study with the views put forward in some of Plato's dialogues, notably The Phaedo, and repeatedly found in the works of others who belong to the tradition of Platonism.

Such is the context in which Aquinas situates his theory of the soul and its knowledge, particularly with regard to its orientation to God. The ability of the human mind to strive in the latter direction when in conjunction with and when separated from the senses is admirably

depicted by St. Thomas in the Neoplatonic boundary image of the soul. It is, of course, true that the Thomistic interpretation of the soul is undertaken in the light of Aquinas' understanding of Aristotle. This leads to his conclusion that it is the substantial form of the body and is so united with it as to constitute a unified, integrated and individual human life. Sensory - based activities and knowledge are the outcome of this structure. This, as was shown, holds true before death. However, although Thomas states that a more perfect soul - body relationship comes into place when the beatified soul and body are reunited at the resurrection, the divine nature of the mind's object of knowledge in beatitude will not permit the senses to play any further part in the provision of knowledge. This view again sits uneasily with Aquinas' preference for Aristotle, particularly given its dominance in the Thomistic account of how we can best come to know God.

Aquinas' theory of the subsistent soul also allows him to account for how the mind can function without the body and the senses and see the essence of God. It is here that the limitations of his Aristotelianism are painfully exposed since the logic of his position demands that Aquinas opt for a concept of the soul which is associated with the Platonic tradition. He finds this concept most imaginatively depicted in the boundary metaphor of Liber de Causis and deliberately chooses this to explain the

soul's dual relationship, as he perceives it, to the bodily time - bound world and to the eternal realm of pure intelligibility. The greater clarity of thought obtained in the latter state can then be effectively portrayed in the soul's separation from the bodily dimension as it presently is.

The difficulty that this poses, however, is considerable and Aquinas obviously became aware of it, certainly in S.T.I.89.1, which is a crucial text in this regard. The unsatisfactory nature of his response here to the question of how the soul can have knowledge after death signifies his ambivalence on this whole issue and identifies a certain incoherence in the Thomistic account of knowledge. It undoubtedly expresses the conflict between Aquinas' Aristotelianism and his Platonism which is always present whenever he comes to describe how the human mind can know anything independently of the senses. In particular, S.T.I.89.1 reveals the limits of his Aristotelianism in relation to what he wants to say about how the mind can see God in the absence of the sensory powers. This difficulty is thus not confined to this text alone but is evident, though perhaps not as dramatically, wherever Aquinas writes about the importance of non - sensory knowledge, even when he tries to qualify his comments by reminding his readers that it is more natural for the human mind to act in conjunction with the senses.

Aquinas' ambivalence is quite cleverly concealed in the metaphor of the boundary soul which appears to suggest that it is somehow in the soul's nature to be capable of relating to reality in association with or when separated from the senses. The problems of such ambivalence are often not sufficiently addressed by Aquinas with the exception of what he writes in S.T.I.89.1. One can only wonder in passing as to how he could have thought that the boundary image of the soul could be reconciled with Aristotle's views. This is even more so the case when Aquinas comes to discuss rapture which in no way can be accounted for in terms of his understanding of Aristotelian psychology and epistemology. The obstacles that are presented by the sensory powers in rapture, as described in the Thomistic account, are particularly pertinent here. The mind's access to God during this experience requires the curtailment of sensory activities and the resulting state of sensory suspension seems also to apply to the beatific vision of God in the resurrection. In general it would seem that Aquinas' view of how the mind can function in rapture and after death and in the final vision of the resurrection owes little to Aristotle and a great deal to Platonism. One might also ask whether his Platonism jeopardises the thrust of Aquinas' Aristotelianism.

His ambivalence is evident too, despite all the Thomistic attempts to emphasise the role of the body in the

resurrection, in the tendency to alternatively value the presence of the body and then to depict the sublime nature of the mind's vision of God which occurs independently of the bodily dimension. In spite of Aquinas' glowing account of the resurrected body, it seems clear that the human body before death had a much more active and productive role in the human life processes compared with the part that it plays in the resurrection.

This work has tried to show that Aquinas' Platonism has a central role in his epistemological theory of how God can best be known and concludes that his stance is a tribute to the logic of his position. Aquinas' belief in the soul's immortality and in the mind's destiny to know God's nature required an explanation which was not available to him from his reading of Aristotle. This led Thomas to weave certain elements from the tradition of Platonism into the fabric of his own thought, thereby allowing him to explain how the mind can reach the essence of God. The problems that emerged as a result undoubtedly put a strain on Aquinas' Aristotelianism and exposed the latter's limitations.

Despite these criticisms, it has to be said that the Thomistic account of how we can best come to know God is intriguing. St. Thomas himself, in a more general way, was always aware of the limitations of philosophical explanations and he once asked himself if the discipline of philosophy was sufficient as a means of ascertaining the

truth about reality (2). His answer was that human beings require more than human reason alone to cope with the exigencies and direction of their lives and that this can only be provided by a form of knowledge beyond what philosophy has to offer. The belief that such knowledge is ultimately available and the hope that it can be validly ascertained by human beings inspire Aquinas' approach to the subject that forms the material of this study. In the light of this, one might conclude that the inevitable limitations of the Thomistic account of how we can best come to know God do not necessarily undermine the truth of his innate conviction that such knowledge occurs independently of the senses.

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(2) S.T.I.1.1.

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Appendices

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN TRANSCENDENCE AND DEATH IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF ST THOMAS AQUINAS

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In *De Veritate* (13, 4 ad 2), St Thomas defines death as the loss of that vital union between soul and body which constitutes human existence. This radical disengagement of the soul from its physical being results in the deprivation of life and of the physical powers.[1] It has a profound ontological effect on human beings who naturally anticipate its inevitable coming with great sadness and with a deep rooted reluctance at the thought of the loss of life that it brings.[2] However, Aquinas also insisted that human existence is essentially transcendent in its nature and orientation and aims at seeing God face to face in a contemplative vision of the divine essence. Aquinas believed that this conclusion was demonstrably in agreement with the truth pursued by human reason although it transcended the latter's capacity to naturally know God in this way. Transcendence, and therefore death, which would seem to prevent transcendence, can only be properly interpreted within the credal basis of Christianity, according to Aquinas, who explicitly uses this framework to validate many of his philosophic views on these issues and he understandably puts great emphasis on the doctrine of bodily resurrection. It is this Christian perspective which allows him to philosophically assert that *beatitudo* involves bodily participation because of the soul's formal substantiality with matter.[3] He confidently claims that even though ultimate happiness perfects the soul on the part of the intellect in respect of which physical being is transcended, the soul does not exclude its natural perfection[4] and that this increases perfect happiness not in intensity but in extent,[5] His Christian belief in a fully human happiness therefore strengthened Aquinas' philosophic claim that there is a human transcendence of death in body and in soul.

It is worth spectulating whether or not it is possible to satisfactorily establish such a conclusion from a purely philosophic point of view, given that death puts an end to human existence. Certainly it can be said that the writings of St Thomas testify to the need for a knowledge which goes beyond what we naturally know through reason alone if we are to adequately account for the way in which death and transcendence are meaningfully related. This is why Aquinas sees Christian revelation playing a crucial role in the elucidation of these processes because it supplements the findings of human reason on matters which would otherwise remain obscure. The Christian framework therefore forms a central part of the Thomistic approach within which his philosophical analysis exposes the parameters of the issues under investigation. This method is summarised by Aquinas in his fundamental principle that faith transcends and perfects reason rather than destroying it *(fides non destruit rationem, sed excedit eam et perficit)*[6]

DEATH

In the *Summa Theologiae*, St Thomas defines death in the following ways:

> Death may be considered in two ways. First, as the privation of life, and thus death cannot be felt, since it is the privation of sense and life. In this way it involves not pain of sense but pain of loss. Secondly, it may be considered as denoting the corruption which ends in the aforesaid privation. (II-IIae, 164, 2).

The departure of life which begins with the onset of death signals the beginning of the process of physical corruption. It is clear from St Thomas' writings on the subject that he saw death as a defect of the body and a consequence of the material principle of human existence.[7] He tells us that matter has a natural inclination for corruption and this results in the corruption of the whole human composite *(De anima* I ad 14). When the soul departs from the body, its act of being is no longer available to the body and therefore 'the subject ceases to be man or animal'.[8]

It is important to note that, according to St Thomas, when we look at the formal nature of human existence, we cannot view death as a natural event.[9] This is because every form intends perpetual being in so far as it can and since the rational soul can achieve its own

perpetuity, because its intellect transcends matter, human existence in its formal nature is not wholly subject to the tendency of its material principle. This leads Aquinas to conclude that, because of its form, to be incorruptible is more natural for human existence than for other corruptible things even though as a composite it is destroyed because of the inclination of its matter. This tension between soul and body is discussed by Anton Pegis in his article, *Between Immortality and Death*, where he makes the point that when we understand that the body is a *human* rather than a *physical* reality, we will then see how appropriate it is to attribute an incorruptibility to both body and soul. By this means, we can regard death as a fact of *human* rather than of *physical* nature, that is, as a fact of a nature that exists wholly within the intellectual life of the soul.[10]

It is in the context of accounting for these opposing inclinations of soul and body and for their effects on human existence that St Thomas introduces the insights of Christian teaching on original sin in order to explain the reasons for the psycho-physical tension involved. He therefore maintains that before the Fall and the loss of original innocence, the body's potential for corruption was held in check by the soul whose spiritual orientation towards God totally determined the role and function of its physical being.[11] This divinely conferred disposition kept physical corruption at bay, thus preventing death as we know it. This state of incorruptibility symbolised the transcendent status of humankind's relationship with God and was in keeping with the soul's nature as the incorruptible form of human existence:

> For man's body was indissoluble not by reason of any intrinsic vigor of immortality, but by reason of a supernatural force given by God to the soul, whereby it was enabled to preserve the body from all corruption so long as it remained itself subject to God. This entirely agrees with reason; for since the rational soul surpasses the capacity of corporeal matter . . . it was most properly endowed at the beginning with the power of preserving the body in a manner surpassing the capacity of corporeal matter. *(Summa Theologiae* 1, 97, 1)

The loss of corporeal transcendence, which is symbolised by and expressed in death, is therefore both unnatural and penal, according to St Thomas. It is unnatural because it contradicts the essential

nature of human existence which aims at the transcendence of both body and soul but because of the revolt against God, the natural tendency of the material principle and of the lower powers was activated so that death inevitably occurred. This also constitutes death as a punishment for sin because it acts so as to subvert the divinely established disposition of an uninterrupted embodiment of human spirituality by destroying human existence itself. However, Aquinas also seems to have believed that even without the intervention of original sin there would have been an end to human life on earth in any case.[12] He claims that in the original state of innocence and having attained to the spiritual life, humankind would have been transported from what he calls the animal life on earth to a life of union with God in heaven.[13] This is what Karl Rahner calls a 'death without dying'.[14] However, in our present state, death comes to us as a dark and unfathomable mystery of emptiness and nothingness in whose hidden character it is difficult to detect any ultimate meaning whatsoever.[15] Aquinas' interpretation of the nature of death and his analysis of its underlying causes are obviously heavily indebted to Christian teaching and his approach also indicates the limitations of a purely philosophic exploration of the issues involved. It is only the Christian perspective, according to Aquinas, that can transcend these natural restrictions and offer a more complete explanation which makes the paradoxical character of death more understandable. Within this perspective and using the relevant philosophic insights, it is possible to account for the ambiguity in our attitudes to death and to reconcile our expectation of perpetuity, our realistic fear of personal extinction and our view of death as that event which must necessarily end our state of becoming.

TRANSCENDENCE

It is the soul's incorruptible nature and its destiny, which is to see God face to face, that grounds Aquinas' view of human transcendence.[16] As the intellectual principle and substantial form of human existence, the rational soul's essential transcendence is expressed through its act of understanding which constitutes its primary operation. St Thomas regarded the relationship between the soul and the intellect as being so close that he sometimes used these terms almost interchangeably as we can see in the following passage

from the *Summa Theologiae:* '. . . the intellectual principle which we call the mind or the intellect has an operation *per se* apart from the body . . . We must conclude, therefore, that the human soul, which is called the intellect or the mind, is something incorporeal and subsistent'. (1, 72, 2)

The intellect's supremacy is demonstrated by its use of the othe human powers which function with reference to it.[17] This superiority is also shown in the soul's relationship with its own act of existence compared with the body's participation in this same act of being, as St Thomas explains in *De anima:*

> Although the soul's act of existing belongs in a certain measure to the body, the body does not succeed in sharing in the soul's act of existing to the full extent of its perfection and actuality and therefore the soul has an operation in which the body does not share. (I ad 18)

Although he is at pains to point out *De unitate intellectus* that his view of the intellect adheres faithfully to that of Aristotle's, it is true to say that St Thomas considerably developed the latter's insights to the point where the intellect is depicted as the principal means by which we come to encounter God as the divine ground of being. This knowledge is based on our sense experience of the world around us but to understand divine reality for what it is, such knowledge must be informed by a supernatural dynamic. By thus interweaving his philosophic investigations with his Christian theology, St Thomas is able to discern that the transcendent tendency of the human intellect, which distinguishes human beings from other creatures, denotes a unique divine likeness. He suggests that such likeness may be Trinitarian in character as an image of the procession of the word from the intellect and of love from the will.[18] The soul's transcendence of death is therefore seen as a function of its intellective character because its primary act of existence ensures that the soul continues to operate after the death of the body. Aquinas speculates that this implies that the separated soul understands in a different way because since there is no longer any sense mediation after death and therefore no phantasms, the soul in separation from the body must turn directly to the intelligible objects.

However, there are certain difficulties with this conclusion which

Anton Pegis identifies in his writings.[19] According to Pegis, these difficulties arise from the way in which St Thomas understands the nature of the relationship between the soul and the body. Pegis claims to detect a notable difference between the earlier and later writings of St Thomas on this point and this difference centres on the ways in which he regards the importance of the soul's embodiment. In the earlier texts, great emphasis on the capacity of the soul to function in the separated mode of being and this independence from its body is highlighted as a superior mode of operating in terms of understanding. There is some suggestion that separation fulfils the soul's intellective needs better than embodiment and that the latter indeed may act as a hindrance to the soul in its search for ultimate knowledge. In the *Summa contra gentiles*, for example, the separateness of the soul, even joined to the body, is forcefully stressed. The benefits of a separated mode of understanding are also emphasised:

> Wherefore when it shall be wholly separated from the body, it will be perfectly likened to separate substances as to the manner of understanding and will receive their influence abundantly. Accordingly, though our act of understanding as regards its mode in the present life ceases when the body perishes, another and higher mode of understanding will take its place. (2, 81)

By linking the soul and separate substances in this way, Aquinas seems to indicate a clear preference for the separated rather than the embodied soul because the former can function better in terms of understanding. Pegis also finds this view expressed in *De veritate* and he comments on it as follows:

> It should be clear that in *De veritate*, qu. 19 St Thomas endows the human soul with two modes of being and two modes of natural operation, the embodied and the separate. He finds no difficulty in saying that the separated soul will be equipped with infused species enabling it to know in a new way as a separate substance. St Thomas all but endows the separated soul with a new nature; or rather, he sees no problem in holding that the separated soul, while having the same nature and the same powers as the embodied soul, will yet be able on separation to function properly as a separate substance.[20]

This problem of the status of the separated soul and its relationship

with embodied human existence receives a different kind of treatment in Aquinas' later writings, according to Pegis. In the *Summa theologiae* (1, 89, 1), when answering the question, whether the separated soul can understand anything at all after death, St Thomas is at pains throughout his response to stress that the embodied soul and its mode of understanding through sense experience is the natural and referential context for interpreting this process. The soul, he states, is different from other separate substances because its union with the body is for the soul's good. As an inferior intellectual substance in the hierarchy of intellectual beings, the human soul requires a great number of species in order to understand and these are, and have to be, less universal than those available to superior intelligences. Aquinas uses an example to illustrate the point he is making: people of weaker intellect have difficulty in acquiring perfect knowledge by means of the universal conceptions of those with a greater understanding and so they need to have things explained to them in great detail, one thing at a time. Examples from sense experience must be provided rather than more abstract and universal formulations. The human soul is naturally like this, according to St Thomas. It is the kind of intelligent form which, *by its nature*, requires union with the body because the way in which it naturally understands requires sense experience if it is to have a proper and adequate knowledge of what is intelligible. This theme is emphasised so strongly in this article (ST 1, 89, 1) by Aquinas that Pegis wonders whether the principal purpose of the article is to demonstrate that embodiment is more than simply a question of the soul's state of existence but is rather 'expressive of a nature, so that, just as the embodied state was natural, so the separated state was beyond the conditions of the soul's nature'[21]. Pegis believes that this article (ST 1, 89, 1) constitutes a new and Aristotelian development in St Thomas' teaching on the soul compared with his earlier views (See SCG 2, 81; *De ver.* 19, 1 etc.) and that this centres on a new understanding of the soul's nature as an embodied intellectual form with its own appropriate mode of knowing.[22] This decisive change, which Pegis discerns in the thinking of Aquinas, means that St Thomas now sees 'the separated soul in the light of the embodied soul considered as the model of what is natural to the soul both in its mode of being and in its mode of operation'.[23]

Embodiment is now regarded as being of the essence of the soul because it is a consequence of the latter's intellectual nature. Aquinas' solution to the problem remains i.e. that the separated soul understands by direct reference to the intelligible objects themselves although he now emphasises that this is beyond the nature of the soul *(sed esse separatum a corpore est praeter rationem suae naturae)*[24] However, he is also careful to say that this way of knowing is not unnatural *(nec tamen propter hoc cognitio non est naturalis)* since God is the author of both grace and nature.[25] This means that, although the soul's separated mode of understanding is not in accordance with the way in which the soul naturally functions, nevertheless this new mode of operating is a possibility available to it after death. This explanation of how the soul knows after death is never quite clear in Aquinas' writings and it is fair to describe it as a speculation which is suggested to him by the nature of the soul and by the requirements of Christian doctrine.

Despite these difficulties in accounting for how we know after death, St Thomas outlines for us the kind of transcendent knowledge which he believes is available to the separated soul after death and we find this set out in the *Summa theologiae* and in *De anima*.[26] According to Aquinas, the separated soul will know other separate substances.[27] Natural things will be known in a general and somewhat confused way because of the nature of understanding in the separated state and the soul will also have a somewhat confused knowledge of singular things.[28] This knowledge will include what was previously known before death or what is determined by some affection or natural aptitude or by a divinely ordained disposition. The habit of knowledge, which remains in the separated soul, pertains to the intellect *per se* but not to the sensitive powers[29] and the intelligible species previously acquired are retained as well as the act of knowledge itself.[30] Local distance does not impede the separated soul's mode of operation[31] although St Thomas does say that the souls of the dead do not naturally know what goes on on earth because their state sets them apart from the living.[32] However, he agrees with Augustine who claimed that the beatified know everything that goes on on earth although this does not affect them in terms of sadness nor does it cause them to interfere in worldly events because they are completely attuned to divine justice.[33]

While all the above features signify the soul's transcendence of death, human transcendence in its most perfect sense is only achieved in the beatific vision of God which is the supernatural destiny of the soul. St Thomas tells us in the *Summa theologiae* that when the beatified see God, they 'possess Him as present, having the power to see Him always; and possessing Him, they enjoy Him as the ultimate fulfilment of desire'.[34] This final experience of human perfection is supernaturally given as a transcendence of both body and soul and Aquinas therefore, as we have already said, feels justified in using the insights of Christian eschatology when speculating on the implications of beatitude. His philosophic arguments are put forward against this background. In the *Summa contra gentiles* (4, 79), for example, he tells us that the immortality of the soul would seem to demand the future resurrection of the body. This conclusion is based on the premises that since the soul is immortal and survives its separation from the body and since it is also naturally united to the body as the substantial form of human existence, it is unnatural for the soul to be without the body. St Thomas then invokes the principle that nothing unnatural can last for ever and concludes that the soul will therefore not be permanently separated from the body but in its immortality will reunite with the body and this, he states, is what it means to rise again. He also claims in the same chapter that the soul is somehow imperfect when separated since it is naturally a part of human nature and consequently perfect human happiness is not ultimately attainable unless the soul is reunited with the body. Pegis comments as follows on the theological perspective involved here:

> As a theologian St Thomas is here giving full verification to a notion that is a distinctive part of his theology, namely, the notion that embodiment is by nature the permanently proper condition of the soul. God had even proportioned an otherwise mortal body, beyond the power of matter, to the immortality of the soul: He had endowed it, through the soul with freedom from death.[35]

In the explicit language of Christian theology this means that the original God-given bodily incorruptibility which was lost through original sin was restored by the death and resurrection of Christ.[36] The subjective condition for this is the potential relationship of the soul

with its matter which remains after death under the same conditions that individualised it:

> None of man's essential principles is utterly annihilated by death: because the rational soul, which is man's form, remains after death . . . The matter also which was subject to that form remains under the same dimensions that individualised it. Accordingly, the same man will be restored as a result of the union of the same identical matter with the same identical form.[37]

Even the souls of the damned are reunited with their bodies but in their state of perpetual desolation, which is both physical and spiritual, their bodies are in constant conflict with their souls which are, in turn, eternally frustrated from reaching perfection.[38] By contrast, the bodily subjection of the beatified soul's vision of God will result in the highest degree of physical excellence:

> The soul that enjoys God will adhere to Him most completely, and will participate in His goodness in the highest degree possible. Wherefore both the body will be perfectly subject to the soul, and it will share in the soul's properties, as far as possible, in acuteness of sense, in the orderliness of the bodily appetite, and in the superlative perfection of its nature. For a thing is so much the more perfect in nature, as its matter is more completely subject to its form.[39]

This physical excellence, which constitutes the beatified body, is expressed in the brightness of its glory *(ipsum corpus suo modo claritatis gloria induetur)*, in its perfect obedience to the soul's desire, in its agility and dignity of nature and in its changeless impassibility.[40] Aquinas consequently remarks in the *Summa theologiae* (I-IIae, 4, 6) that the perfect disposition of the body, both antecedently (as a spiritual or glorified body) and consequently (by receiving the 'overflow' of happiness from the soul), is necessary for that happiness which is in all ways perfect. This perfect conformity and state of being obviously does not apply to the damned after death. Their bodies, St Thomas tells us, will not be spiritual but carnal in their affections although they will be restored to integrity.[41] They will not be physically agile and obey their souls without difficulty, like the bodies of the beatified, but will be heavy and unwieldy and insupportable to their

souls. Although they will not be corrupted, the bodies of the damned will be passible and will be afflicted by many sensible things. In this way they will be permanently joined to their souls in an eternally turbulent mode of frustrated being. This frightening picture, which is painted by St Thomas in Book 4 of the *Summa contra gentiles*, is the outcome of human choice and responsibility and is determined by the requirements of divine justice. It is initiated in the final judgement of the soul after death and collectively confirmed for humankind in the communal judgement for all at the end of time in body and in soul.[42] These conclusions of Aquinas, which are of course informed by his Christian theology, point to the importance of the body in its relationship with the soul after death and indicate that the human tendency towards absolute transcendence, whether successfully accomplished or permanently frustrated, affects the human being in both body and soul.

DEATH AND TRANSCENDENCE

The fundamental assumption which shapes and directs Aquinas' treatment of these issues is that death and transcendence and the relationship between them can only be properly understood and explained within the Christian theological tradition. His analysis reveals that the true dimensions of death and transcendence are inexplicable to human reason alone and that the relationship between them involves a supernatural process which cannot be adequately interpreted within an exclusively philosophical perspective. This is because the ambiguous and paradoxical features of these processes testify to the presence of a profound mystery at the heart of existence which can never be fully understood. In acknowledging its reality it is possible to perceive that its encompassing nature links death to transcendence in such a way that, instead of death being regarded as that event which terminates human existence, it is seen as a necessary threshold that must be crossed if perfect human happiness is to be attained.[43] Once this possibility is accepted, then the subjective fear and terror of personal extinction which often underlies our attitudes to death can be transformed into a positive anticipation of the final end.

It is therefore in the context of ultimate transcendence that death is interpreted by St Thomas. He believes that there is a dynamic at the heart of existence which expresses itself as a permanent orientation

towards an absolute horizon of ineffable perfection. Moreover, this orientation creates a specific obligation on human consciousness to tend towards a state of perfection and to accept the possibility that such a state is ultimately attainable. The ontological attunement and fundamental hope (or its alternative, depending on human choice) is subjectively manifested in the unique character of human existence itself. This is identified as a state of 'in-betweenness' by St Thomas since he considers the soul to be at the boundary of what is physical and spiritual.[44] The intellect reaches out from this unique state towards perfect being and therefore any comprehensive account of death and transcendence must refer to both the physical and spiritual aspects of being human in a way which recognises the importance of both. Aquinas' treatment of the complex nature of the relationship between them tries to do this and in doing so he demonstrates the inability of human reason alone to offer a satisfactory explanation. Philosophy does, of course, explore and expose the ambiguities and paradoxical features of death and transcendence but its limits urge us to look for a more adequate answer for the sake of over-all intelligibility. This speculative helplessness of philosophy to satisfactorily penetrate the relationship between these processes suggests the need for a form of knowledge which transcends the capacity of the human intellect itself. This is the argument in the Thomistic writings for divine revelation which supplements human wisdom and develops the insights of philosophical thought. Aquinas' greatest contribution to the debate on death and transcendence may well lie in his insistence that such issues cannot be fully appreciated outside the framework of religious belief because they constitute in ultimate terms *the* mystery for human understanding and in fact reveal the mystery of being itself.

FOOTNOTES:

1. *Summa contra gentiles* 4, 52 (hereafter cited as SCG); *Summa theologiae* I-IIae, 73, 2 (hereafter cited as ST); ST III, 50, 6; *De anima* 1.
2. SCG 3, 48; ST I-IIae, 42, 2.
3. ST I-IIae, 4, 6.
4. ST I-IIae, 4, 5 ad 1.
5. ST I-IIae, 4, 5 ad 5.
6. *De veritate* 14, 10 ad 9.
7. ST I-IIae, 85, 6.
8. ST III, 50, 4.
9. ST I-IIae, 85, 6.

10. A. Pegis, 'Between Immortality and Death: Some Further Reflections on the *Summa contra gentiles*', *The Monist* (58(1974) 1-15 at 14-15.
11. SCG 4, 87.
12. ST I, 102, 4.
13. See Karl Rahner's comment: 'Even without sin man would have ended his biological, historical life in space and time, and would have entered into his definitive condition before God by means of a free act engaging his whole life. Death as we know it now, as part of man's constitution subject to concupiscence, in darkness, weakness and obscurity regarding its actual nature . . . is a consequence of sin'. *(Sacramentum Mundi* 2:59).
14. K. Rahner, *Theology of Death* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1961) 42-43.
15. See, for example, Rahner (n. 14) 42-43; K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, trans. D. Bourke (London: DLT, 1974) 11:309-321; idem, *Theological Investigations*, trans. D. Bourke (London: DLT, 1975) 13:169-186.
16. See, for example, SCG 3, 51.
17. 'However it is clear that the intellect is that which is principal in man, and that which uses all the powers of the soul as well as all the members of the body; wherefore Aristotle has accurately said: "Man is principally intellect" ' *(De unitate intellectus).*
18. ST I, 93, 6.
19. See, for example, A.C. Pegis, 'The Separated Soul and its Nature in St Thomas' in E. Gilson, ed., *St Thomas Aquinas 1274-1974. Commemorative Studies* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1974) 1:131.
20. Pegis (n.19) 144.
21. Pegis (n.19) 137.
22. Pegis (n.19) 138.
23. ibid.
24. ST I, 89, 1.
25. ST I, 89, 1 ad 3.
26. ST I, 89; *De anima* 15 et seq.
27. ST I, 89, 2.
28. ST I, 89, 3 and 4; *De anima* 18 and 20.
29. ST I, 89, 5.
30. ST I, 89, 6.
31. ST I, 89, 7.
32. ST I, 89, 8.
33. ibid.
34. ST I, 12, 7 ad 1.
35. Pegis (n.19) 158.
36. SCG 4, 81.
37. ibid.
38. SCG 4, 89 et seq.
39. SCG 4, 89.
40. SCG 4, 86.
41. SCG 4, 89.
42. SCG 4, 91 et seq.
43. SCG 3, 48.
44. See SCG 2, 68; ST I, 77, 2: *De anima* 1.

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AQUINAS'S CONCEPT OF THE BODY AND OUT OF BODY SITUATIONS

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THE PROBLEM

It is commonly assumed that Aquinas's view of the human body is similar to that of Aristotle, who regarded the body and the senses as being indispensable for the production of knowledge. However, while this is true to a great extent, there are also passages in Aquinas's writings where he seems to put forward quite a different view. This states that, in order to understand God's essence, we must dispense with any kind of knowledge that is mediated through the senses and the body's capacity to interfere with the intellect at this highest level of cognition must consequently be curbed. This view emerges in those parts of Aquinas's writings where he discusses rapture, which he maintains is a living state in which God's essence can be known, and also when he writes about the knowledge of God that is available to the beatified soul both when separated from the body by death and when reunited with it in the state of resurrection.

The purpose of this article is to consider this rather negative view of the body that Aquinas appears to have had, and to examine its implications for his theory of knowledge and for his contribution to the philosophy of religion. Aquinas's treatment of rapture will form a crucial part of this examination as well as his speculations about what happens to the body after death. It does seem rather incongruous, though, when we think about it, for any Aristotelian to suggest that the body and the senses can impede the search for knowledge or have no part to play in the process where the knowledge of God's essence is concerned. Yet this is the position of Aquinas who did not hesitate to say that the senses and bodily images (phantasmata) are redundant when it comes to such cognition. However, this conclusion is understandable in view of his insistence that, though God's existence could be inferred from the world around us, God's own nature could not be known in the same way since the kind of knowledge required for this completely transcended all kinds of sense-based experiences. But it is also fair to say that the kind of reservations he expresses about human bodiliness and sense-based cognition would suggest a greater affinity with the thinking of Plato than with that of Aristotle, at least on these points. Indeed there is little doubt about the

Platonic tone of some of Aquinas's utterances concerning how the human intellect functions when independent of the senses.[1] But, if it is true, as he maintains, that the body is superfluous in the production of the highest kind of knowledge, then it does seem as if the normal process of human understanding which depends on the senses and human bodiliness as it is presently constituted are, at best, of only temporary importance for humankind in the long run.

AQUINAS'S TWO THEORIES OF KNOWLEDGE

Aquinas, at times, appears to leave us with two differing accounts of how the soul knows things, without attempting to establish whether or not these approaches can be harmonized with one another. He writes, almost casually, about the soul's ability to know reality in two radically distinct ways, namely, at a lower level of cognition when knowledge is sense-based and by a direct cognizance which transcends the senses at the highest noetic level depending respectively on whether the soul is embodied or not.[2] It is difficult, though, to conceive how the same soul can act in such diverse ways unless the body is somehow peripheral to intellectual functioning in the production of knowledge. Aquinas adopts a subtle position on this by maintaining that, while mental activity essentially transcends human embodiment and sense-experience, nevertheless it is natural and appropriate for the intellect to employ the sense powers.[3] It is difficult to be sure of what exactly is meant by this when we look at the kind of response given by Aquinas in *S.T.* I.89.1, which is baffling to say the least. In an article which purports to explain how the soul can have any knowledge in separation from the body, Aquinas spends most of his time trying to justify the use of the senses in human cognition. Only very briefly does he address the issue at hand (i.e., whether the separated soul can understand) and this simply takes the form of asserting that the soul has cognition without the body, by turning directly to intelligible objects, this being possible through the special power of God. Aquinas always maintains that such direct knowledge is superior to what can be abstracted from intelligible images and in *Summa Contra Gentiles* III.47 we find him stating that 'the more the mind is raised to the contemplation of spiritual things, the more is it withdrawn from sensible things' so that when it 'sees the divine substance, [the mind] must be wholly freed from the senses, either by death or by rapture'. *This is undoubtedly* linked to his earlier definition of the soul, in *S.C.G.* II.68, as a separate substance or intelligence though its status of being the body's form confers on it the dubious honour of being the lowest and the weakest of intelligences. Aquinas claims in II.81 that the post-mortem separated soul receives from the other superior intelligences what he calls a more abundant overflow ('tamquam a superioribus, uberius influentiam recipere poterit') so that

it can understand more perfectly. This picture of an emanation of intelligence from superior to inferior minds is surely Neoplatonic in inspiration. Aquinas goes on to say that the less the soul is preoccupied with its own body, the more easily it can interpret higher things. He cites as an example of this the function of the virtue of temperance which withdraws the soul from bodily pleasures and so makes it more apt to understand. Such distancing from bodily preoccupations is a condition for a more perfect cognition.

AQUINAS'S MODEL OF HUMAN BODILINESS

One might then ask whether Aquinas has some theory of the human body which provides him with a way of harmonizing, at least to some extent, these apparently incompatible views. I believe that we can discover such a theory in his writings and that this is based both on the implicit Platonism in his thought and also on his Christian belief in bodily resurrection. His model for human bodiliness is to be found in his view of the glorified resurrected human body of Christian teaching. This body is perfectly attuned to its soul's intellectual orientation to God and is agile, impassible, spiritualized and full of the brightness of glory.[4] Such a perfect state of embodiment does not impinge on the mind's freedom to know God's essence. This state is anticipated by what happens in the experience of rapture. However, Aquinas is not suggesting either that it is a flawed bodily state that exclusively prevents us from knowing God. His point is that such knowledge is beyond the capacity of any intelligent creature in any case and can only occur because God gratuituously chooses to make such knowledge available by providing a special mental disposition or illumination to enable finite intelligences to attain such knowledge. This is clear from what he says in *S.T.* I.94.3 where he discusses how much knowledge the first human beings had before original sin. He maintains that even though God was known then with a more perfect knowledge than we now have, God's essence was cognized only by virtue of a special divine intervention. The same is true of angelic knowledge, despite its superiority to human cognition (*S.T.* I.56.3).

It is clear from his writings that Aquinas considered the body a less than perfect partner for the soul at the higher levels of intellectual activity. Only when the corruptible body of present life was divinely refashioned and became incorruptible after death in the beatific vision of the resurrection, could there be perfect harmony between them.[5] It is from this ideal standpoint that what Aquinas says about the body in rapture and in the post-mortem state must be considered even though there are still certain difficulties for his Aristotelianism when he tries to justify the ultimate redundancy of the body and senses in the production of knowledge. It is this model of bodiliness which I believe explains Aquinas's rather negative

view of the body as a hindrance to knowledge and the secondary role which he allocates to it when he discusses rapture or the beatific vision of the separated soul and of the soul when reunited to the resurrected body. The texts dealing with these issues which form the content of this study are taken from *De Veritate*, *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologica*.

RAPTURE

Aquinas argues that it is possible to see God's substance when in a state of rapture and he seems to have been convinced that Paul had some such experience before death. He bases his conclusion on Paul's own report in 2 Corinthians 12 and on the comments on this passage by subsequent Christian thinkers, notably Augustine. Aquinas tries rather forcefully to persuade us to agree that Paul must have seen God's essence (*De Ver.* 13.2 & *S.T.* II-II.175.3) although when we read the scriptural passage in question such an interpretation is by no means certain. The knowledge obtained in rapture is made available by special divine provision similar to what happens in the post-mortem knowledge of the soul, according to Aquinas, the principal difference being that, in rapture, the knowledge of God's essence is qualified (*De Ver.* 13.2), whereas in the beatific vision after death, it is not. The activity of the sense-powers is totally suspended in rapture and the soul is said to be estranged or separated from the senses ('alienatur a sensibus') or abstracted from them ('a sensibus abstrahatur') according to *De Veritate* 13.3.

It is not relevant to the purpose of this article to try to establish whether or not Paul actually experienced a rapturous vision of God while still alive. What is important is that Aquinas believed that he did and as a result tried to develop a theory of how such knowledge could come about without sense experience. It is interesting to compare Paul's experience in 2 Corinthians 12 and Aquinas's analysis of it with the report given by the pagan mystic philosopher Plotinus in *Ennead* IV.8.1 where he tells us about his vision of great beauty and of how he came 'to identify with the divine'. Like Plotinus, too, Aquinas was aware of spurious mental states which could replicate rapture in some respects, and in *De Veritate* 13.1, he cites the examples of insanity, mental derangement, human weakness or fainting fits as instances of these. In *S.T.* II-II.175.1, he adds demonic possession to the list. Unlike authentic states of rapture leading to the vision of God, these spurious conditions of elation depress the mind rather than genuinely enhancing it, according to Aquinas, and we ourselves can see contemporary instances of this in mental illnesses like manic-depressive psychosis or in the heightened states of consciousness that can result from stress-related conditions or from the use of hallucinogenic drugs.

In *De Veritate* 13.1, rapture is defined as a state of elevation contrary to nature ('contra naturam elevatum') and Aquinas claims that, even though

our intellects naturally depend on the senses and on the imagination, it is possible for someone to focus so directly on intelligible reality alone that all inferior things are transcended ('omnibus inferioribus praetermissis'). Presumably this last refers to the particular concerns of mundane life and of the physical environment that we inhabit. Aquinas suggests, however, that such attention is involuntary in the sense that we cannot bring about in ourselves the knowledge of God's essence,[6] and says that the ability to attend exclusively to intellectual things arises from something divine within us and not from our humanity *per se* ('non est ejus inquantum est homo, sed inquantum aliquid in eo divinum existit'). In support of his view, he cites Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics (Book 10, 7, 1177b 26) where perfect contemplative happiness is said to become possible in virtue of what is divine in us. It is also worth while noting Porphyry's report on Plotinus's last words in this connection where we are exhorted to liberate the divine within: 'Try to bring back the god in you to the divine in the All.'[7] This notion of an inner divine disposition, as earlier mentioned, is translated by Aquinas in other places as a divine illumination, an image which is also strongly Platonic.[8]

When we fix our attention almost exclusively on the things of the senses, Aquinas continues (*De Ver.* 13.1), this has to do with our animal nature rather than our humanity.[9] This seems to imply that our lives reflect two levels, the divine and the animal, the former attracting us intellectually beyond the realm of sense experience and the latter drawing us towards an immersion in the things of the senses. In other writings too, Aquinas shows this preference for Platonism's theory of two worlds where the human being interfaces the different levels of bodily and spiritual realities, existing, as he tells us, on the horizon and borders of time and eternity.[10] In *De Veritate*, he asserts a conflict of interests between the body and the mind that results in their competing for attention and it is in terms of this that he outlines what rapture means. A rapturous experience occurs when all sense activities are suspended since this is necessary to facilitate the intense mental activity that characterizes it. The conflict between senses and intellect is resolved when whatever is divine in us takes precedence over bodily concerns, this process being brought about by the special power of God.

A question that arises in connection with Aquinas's distinction between genuine rapture and spurious out of body states caused by such conditions as mental instability concerns how we are to distinguish one from the other. It is not always easy, for example, to differentiate between the demeanour of a religious mystic and that of a schizophrenic. However, Aquinas does not provide us with any clear criterion for determining the validity of a rapturous experience other than to say that genuine rapture is involuntary and leads to God (*S.T.* II-II.175.1). Apart from this, the experience appears to be self-validating so that authentic rapture becomes, from an interior standpoint, self-evident. One might argue against these

points that some degree of choice is often involved in selecting conditions that facilitate mystic experiences (e.g., a monastic environment or a devotional mantra) and that the introverted nature of such extraordinary states is so enigmatic as to make it extremely difficult to distinguish between, for example, the confidence of a schizophrenic who claims to hear divine voices and that of a religious mystic who believes himself or herself to have had an authentic vision of God. Such problems place obstacles in the way of establishing clear external criteria which would validate the genuineness or otherwise of what is claimed to be authentic rapture.

In *S.T.* II-II.175.1, Aquinas develops his definition of rapture as an involuntary activity when he describes the enraptured person being carried or snatched away from the activities of the senses which he says is in accordance with how the term 'raptus' is defined, which is as a state of violence. The human soul is transported beyond its nature ('praeter naturam') by being withdrawn from the cognition of sense-based things, which forms the natural basis for knowledge. The mind, in this state, is raised involuntarily to those things to which human beings are naturally drawn, by which Aquinas presumably means the knowledge of God.

THE NATURE OF SEPARATION IN RAPTUROUS EXPERIENCES

It is clear from his writings that whatever kind of withdrawal Aquinas has in mind, it is not the kind of absolute separation of soul and body that characterizes death (*S.T.* II-II.175.5). Neither is it the kind of mental abstraction that can occur when a person's mind is wandering (*S.T.* I-II.175.1). Whatever kind of separation is involved seems much more complex, as Aquinas's treatment indicates in *De Veritate* 13, arts. 3 & 4 and in *S.T.* II-II.175, arts. 4 & 5. In *De Veritate* 13.4, he discusses the degree of abstraction necessary for seeing God in the context of depicting the mutual interference between the senses and intellect. He insists that the intellect must not be impeded by anything when its most perfect act of understanding ('quae est actus perfectissimus intellectus') takes place. He then proceeds to investigate how such interference might occur, either intrinsically or extrinsically. The senses are clearly of major importance here although Aquinas acknowledges that senses and intellect mutually impede each other since their respective activities compete for attention and the mind is, in any case, somewhat submerged in sense activities because it extracts intelligibility from the sense images or phantasmata. Aquinas maintains that all of this contributes to the pollution of intellectual purity.

However, the soul–body union, which is a natural union, does not in itself interfere with intellectual purity and excellence, according to Aquinas. This is because the existence of such unity is not dependent on

the soul's attention to sustain it. The soul is not joined to the body as its form through the mediation of its powers but rather through its essence. This means that an immaterial faculty like the intellect, which is the primary power of the soul, can continue to function irrespective of whether soul and body are united or separated, unless it is an essential condition of such noetic activity that it can only occur through sense-mediation. While Aquinas will obviously allow that, in the normal course of things, human cognition does occur in the latter way, he always insists that because the nature of intellectual activity essentially transcends the senses, the mind, through the special intervention of God, can exercise its cognitive capacity without using the senses such as in the state of rapture or after death. What he wants to say in *De Veritate* 13.4 is that no matter how intense the degree of mental activity is for the enraptured person (which will obviously be considerable when contemplating God), the mind does not have to be completely separated from the body, as in death, in order to know God's essence.

Aquinas then proceeds (*De Ver.* 13.4) to discuss the kind of interference that can impede the intellect's access to higher knowledge, and he identifies two kinds of possible obstacles. First there is the vegetative side of human life (which involves growth and nourishment), but initially, at least, he rejects this as hindering the mind and says that intellectual activity is not affected by it. However, he later qualifies this by claiming that the presentation and reception of the sense images (on which the intellect normally depends) may be adversely affected by the condition of the sense organs which are nourished and sustained by the vegetative processes. He gives as examples the activities of eating and sleeping, which can interfere with intellectual activities; and we can easily provide our own illustrations of such interference, as for instance, in the case of defective organs which can impede the mind's functioning in old age. However, Aquinas insists that this is not all a one-sided intrusion from the senses, since the mind also imposes its own restrictions on sense activities. An example of this is the way in which the imaginative faculty is inhibited during the course of contemplation. Since God's essence can only be seen without sense images, it is evident that such cognition must suspend all imaginative activity.

Having thus described the conflict between senses and intellect, Aquinas concludes that what is required for the vision of God is not so much an abstraction from the vegetative processes, which continue to function throughout the experience of rapture, but rather an abstraction from sense activities. However, he does not really explain how this can occur, apart from maintaining that it is the result of an extraordinary intervention by God. There is not a great deal more that is added to this discussion by what is said in *S.T.* II-II.175, arts. 4 & 5 on the suspension of the senses.

THE LIMITATIONS OF RAPTURE

The enigmatic character of rapture clearly makes it difficult to provide an explanation of what transpires, as is clear from such accounts as those given by Paul and Plotinus. This is arguably why Aquinas is necessarily vague about what kind of intellectual withdrawal from sense activities occurs, although this is clearly a central feature of the process. An important characteristic, already mentioned and identified in both *De Veritate* and *Summa Theologica*, is the qualified nature of rapture. In *De Veritate* 13.2 Aquinas contrasts the restrictions that exist in Paul's beatific knowledge with the lack of any such limitations in post-mortem beatitude. He uses an analogy of light to explain this difference and despite its being a rather dated example, we can see what he is trying to get at. In some things, like the stars or precious stones, Aquinas maintains, the light of the sun is to be found as an abiding form, as though it were connatural to these things; but it passes through other things like the air and leaves only a temporary impression. Analogously, the light of glory remains in unqualified beatitude after death but only leaves a transitory impression in the qualified state of rapture.

However, the question arises as to how God's essence can be known in the way suggested and still leave only a temporary impression. In *S.T.* II-II.175.3, objection 2 addresses this very point. It suggests that if Paul's vision was beatific, then he would not have returned to the unhappiness of this life but his body would have been glorified by the soul's overflowing happiness as the saints are in the resurrection. Earlier in *S.T.* I.94.1, when dismissing the possibility that the first human being before the loss of original innocence may have seen God's essence, Aquinas has already said that no one can reject God after this experience since that would mean that God's essence had not been encountered. In *S.T.* II-II.175.3 ad 2, he gives an unsatisfactory reply to the second objection, simply reaffirming his belief that the divine light of glory can be either a permanently abiding form as with the saints in heaven or a transitory passion as in the light of prophecy. He does not really address satisfactorily the crucial issue of how God's essence can be known without leaving a permanent effect on the mind and fixating the will.

There is also the related question as to Paul's level of awareness about the body while enraptured. This is debated in both *De Veritate* 13.5 and in *S.T.* II-II.175.6. The answer given by Aquinas is necessarily speculative in both texts and relies on Paul's own report in 2 Cor 12:2 ('whether in the body or out of the body I know not') where Paul admits to confusion and ignorance about whether he was embodied or not.[11] Aquinas draws heavily on Augustine's interpretation and concludes that Paul simply did not know whether or not his soul was united to his body. If this is correct, it confirms yet again the very secondary role that the body plays in this kind of encounter, which is also true of post-mortem beatitude. Despite

Aquinas's statement in *S.T.* II-II.175.1, one might argue that the intellectual engrossment of rapture is similar to any state of thinking in which we become so immersed that we seem to lose an awareness of our physical surroundings.

THE BODY'S STATUS

It should now be clear that the body's role in the state of rapture is very much a background one, namely, that of simply being there for the soul and of not interfering with the mind's attempts to know God's essence. This theme is further developed, although not always in a thoroughly consistent way, by what Aquinas has to say about the body after death. It is evident from his writings that he wanted to believe that human bodiliness was important for the complete perfection of the soul. Apart from the sadness that the thought of death evokes, with its loss of life and human bodiliness,[12] Aquinas does not consider it natural that the soul and body should be permanently separated.[13] He maintains that a potential relationship still exists between soul and body after death[14] and claims that the matter which was subject to its form remains under the same dimensions that individualized it ('materia etiam manet, quae tali formae fuit subjecta, sub dimensionibus eisdem, ex quibus habebat ut esset individualis materia'). He bases this conclusion on the premise that none of the human being's essential principles is annihilated by death since the rational soul is unaffected by mortality. He does not explain, however, why matter should be retained in this way simply as a consequence of the soul's survival. These points are discussed in *S.C.G.* IV.81 where he is trying to provide a rational justification for the doctrine of bodily resurrection. The latter is the kind of resolution that one might expect to the dilemma of soul–body separation, he argues, since it is natural for the soul to be united to the body.[15] Belief in the resurrection of the body clearly makes it desirable that matter should potentially exist in the manner attributed to it by Aquinas since it makes it theoretically easier to understand how it can be reformed by the soul through the power of God so that the reunified human being can be ultimately restored. An assumption that underlies this view for Aquinas is that death, as we now experience it, is the result of original sin which allowed the intrinsic tendency of the material principle of human life to bring about terminal change and dissolution and the corruption associated with mortality. Aquinas claims that this would not have occurred in the original state of innocence before sin because then the soul would have been able to successfully exert total spiritual control over its body to the point where, at the end of life on earth, we would have been transported, in body and in soul, to paradise without suffering death.[16] The human body, he states, was then indissoluble 'not by reason of any intrinsic vigour of immortality, but by reason of a supernatural force given

by God to the soul, whereby it was enabled to preserve the body from all corruption so long as it remained itself subject to God' (*S.T.* I.97.1). The soul's control over the bodily tendency to corrupt is only re-established through the extraordinary goodness of God which brings about a state of final resurrection where the beatified are confirmed not only in their spiritual perfection but in perfect human bodiliness as well. Conversely, Aquinas argues that, though the bodies of the damned will also be incorruptible, they will be engaged in perpetual conflict with their souls which are averted from God, and this is part of the punishment of damnation.[17] These bodies will be unspiritual and grossly carnal in orientation ('eorum corpora non erunt spiritualia, quasi spiritui omnino subjecta, sed magis eorum anima per effectum erit carnalis'). They will be heavy and unwieldy and somewhat insupportable to their souls ('pondorosa, et gravia, et quodammodo animae insupportabilia'). This portrait of the state of the damned is remarkably similar in some respects to the *Phaedo*'s description of impure souls. This kind of soul is depicted as being 'weighed down and dragged back into the visible world' (80C), hovering about tombs and graveyards and retaining some portion of visibility (80D). Such souls are imprisoned by corporality (80DE) and assume the form of perverse animality.[18]

This state of bodiliness clearly contrasts with the spiritualization of the beatified in Aquinas's writings where the latter bodies are depicted as agile, capable of easy and unwearying movement, having acuteness of sense and orderliness of bodily desire, being impassible and exhibiting the brightness of a body that is wholly subject to the command of its soul.[19] Aquinas's understanding of what human bodiliness is, is clearly in terms of the latter qualities. In his article, 'Between Immortality and Death', Anton Pegis sums up Aquinas's approach to embodiment by saying that the Thomistic conception of what being human means must be understood in terms of the body existing in the world of the soul rather than the opposite.[20] In more recent comments on these issues, Simon Tugwell stresses that the human body as it presently exists is necessarily viewed as being flawed from a Christian standpoint, given the belief in an incorruptible resurrected body.[21]

Aquinas's conception of the body can therefore be understood if we bear these points in mind. His thoughts on out of body states reflect not only a theological concern that the body should not interfere with the soul's cognition of God's essence, but a model of human existence which is so spiritually integrated that the body itself can transcend the limitations of matter. It is from this point of departure that the intellect can function freely in the state of resurrection. Aquinas describes the knowledge of the soul separated from the body after death by saying that 'it will understand by itself after the manner of substances wholly separate from their bodies as to their being'.[22]

But although this statement is made in the context of writing about the separated soul, this free exercise of intelligence continues into the state of resurrection. The sentiments expressed above are not unlike the kind of remarks found in *Phaedo* 66B–67B where comparable opinions are expressed. Indeed, now that it is becoming more widely accepted that Aquinas's thinking was influenced by Platonism,[23] when we reflect on his treatment of knowledge and bodiliness as outlined here, such a conclusion seems probable. While it might be simplistic to suggest that whereas he imitated Aristotle in asserting soul–body unity and used Platonism to explain the soul's separability from the body and its immortality,[24] the evident difficulties in his treatment of the issues discussed above raises the question as to whether it is ever possible for a Christian thinker to be a thoroughgoing Aristotelian. It is arguable that what has been called the Platonic heritage of Thomism[25] helped Aquinas's interpretation of how human beings could have cognition that was not sense-based. The intellectual tradition of Neoplatonism which may have influenced his theory of the soul–body relationship and his views about the unique kind of knowledge described above was in all likelihood transmitted to Aquinas by thinkers whom he respected such as Avicenna, Averroes and Maimonides and by *Liber De Causis* (which summarized the thinking of Proclus) from which Aquinas adopted some of his thinking on the soul.[26] There was the additional factor of the authoritative status that Platonism still had for the Christian generation of Aquinas. This may explain to some extent why he was able to maintain a conception of interdependence between senses and intellect based on the Aristotelian model, while simultaneously holding that a higher form of human knowledge existed which was not sense-based.

SOME DIFFICULTIES IN AQUINAS'S THEORY OF HUMAN BODILINESS

The ambiguity of Aquinas's position appears most dramatically in those texts where he tries to find a meaningful role for the body after the resurrection. Although he tells us that 'without the body the soul can be happy' (*S. T.* I-II.4.5), he goes on to add that bodily beauty and swiftness of nature extend to human perfection ('sicut pulchritudo corporis, vel velocitas ingenii pertinet ad perfectionem hominis'). The latter reference is somewhat obscure but Aquinas may be thinking along the same lines as in *S. C. G.* IV.86 where he writes about the resurrected beatified body as being agile and wholly mobile, completely in harmony with the soul's orientation to God and now capable of definition as a spiritual body ('corpus spirituale'), a phrase Aquinas takes from 1 Corinthians 15:44. He goes on to argue in *S. T.* I-II.4.5 that because the soul is the natural form of the body, its act of understanding will be all the more perfect when it occurs in the context where the soul is embodied. He even adds in his reply

to objection 4 that separation from the body can hold back the soul from tending with all its might to the vision of God's essence, and bases this conclusion once again on the assumption that when the body is present it makes the soul's knowledge of God's nature perfect in every way. He says that the separated soul's enjoyment of God makes it wish for the body to share in its happiness. Again in *S.T.* I-II.4.6 ad 2, Aquinas tells us that even though human bodiliness plays no part in knowing God's essence, the lack of bodiliness could prove a hindrance to human happiness. Consequently bodily perfection is necessary lest the mind be impeded from being lifted up: 'Dicendum, quod etsi corpus nihil conferat ad illam operationem intellectus, qua Dei essentia videtur, tamen posset ab hac impedire: et ideo requiritur perfectio corporis, ut non impediat elevationem mentis' (*S.T.* I-II.4.6 ad 2).

The difficulty with all this, as Tugwell points out,[27] is that if all human desire is satisfied with the vision of God's essence, as surely it must be, then how can the body add anything to such human happiness? On the other hand, there must be some sense in which the latter is not a purely intellectual state, and undoubtedly it is this aspect that Aquinas is trying to defend. He appears to be back again to saying, as with rapture, that the vision of God is qualified or somehow incomplete, in this case without the body. He seems to want to defend simultaneously a view which maintains that human happiness is complete when God's essence is known by the soul alone, and a position which holds that it is only through bodily involvement that such happiness is complete. We can see why he might want to do this but, even granting his model of human bodiliness, it is not clear how these positions can be reconciled with one another. Tugwell regards Aquinas's stance as expressive of some embarrassment on his part about the resurrected body.[28] There is nevertheless one statement by Aquinas which particularly indicates the general direction of his thinking on this issue. This occurs in *S.T.* I-II.4.6 ad 3, in reply to the third objection. The objection itself takes up a point made previously by Aquinas himself that a more perfect understanding occurs according to the degree of bodily abstraction. Since happiness relates to the most perfect intellectual operation, this means that the soul should be abstracted from the body in every way. Consequently, the objection concludes, no bodily disposition is necessary for happiness. The interest of Aquinas's reply lies in his introduction of the distinction between the corruptible and incorruptible body. It is true, he admits, that the perfect intellectual operation requires the abstraction of the intellect from this corruptible body that makes the soul heavy ('dicendum, quod ad perfectam operationem intellectus requiritur quidem abstractio ab hoc corruptibili corpore, quod aggravat animam'). But such abstraction is not necessary in the case of the spiritual body which is totally subject to the spirit. Here once again is evidence that Aquinas's understanding of true human bodiliness centres on the human body that is resurrected. However, one may wonder what kind of bodiliness this is

which is so spiritualized that it does not seem to conform to any concept of the body as we know it.

There is at least an incompleteness about Aquinas's theory of human bodiliness which is unsatisfactory. This exposes, in my view, the inherent ambivalence which exists in his thinking on this issue. I believe that this has its philosophical roots in the twin influences of Platonism and Aristotelianism which are discernible in the blend of Neoplatonism that appears at times in his writings. When we take this into account together with his Christian belief in ultimate bodily resurrection and his conviction that human happiness is attainable through a direct vision of God's essence, it is not difficult to appreciate how the ambiguities and incompatibilities in his theory of human bodiliness might have arisen. But despite the unresolved issues in his writings on soul and body, the questions that he posed remain important for the philosophy of religion. Though one's acceptance of his views must necessarily rest on a number of factors, including those of a credal nature, Aquinas's contribution to the debate on the possibility of a higher knowledge stands out as worthy of comment. For these reasons, notwithstanding the fact that his efforts to explain the body's role at the highest levels of cognition may not have been fully realized, his approach to these questions is still, I believe, philosophically exciting.

Notes

1 Cf., e.g., *Summa Contra Gentiles* II.81. (The translation of *S.C.G.* is taken from *The 'Summa Contra Gentiles' of Saint Thomas Aquinas Literally Translated* by the English Dominican Fathers [London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne Ltd, 1924–1929], Books 1–4.)

2 *S.C.G.* II.81 & *Summa Theologica* I.89.1. There is also the special case of rapture dealt with in *De Veritate*, Question 13 and in *S.T.* II-II, Question 175 which will be examined later in this article. (The translation of *S.T.* is taken from *St Thomas Aquinas 'Summa Theologica' Literally Translated* by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province [London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1947–1948], Vols. 1–3.)

3 *S.T.* I.89.1.

4 *S.C.G.* IV.86 & *S.T.* I-II.4.5 and 4.6.

5 Aquinas's statements on the bodies of the damned provide an interesting contrast to such ideal harmony: cf. *S.C.G.* IV.89.

6 *S.T.* II-II.175.1.

7 'Porphyry On The Life of Plotinus and The Order of His Books' in H. A. Armstrong (trans.), *Plotinus* Vol. 1 (Cambridge Mass. & London: Harvard University Press & William Heinemann Ltd, 1966), p. 7.

8 *In Librum Boetii De Trinitate Expositio* 1.2 & *S.T.* I.89.1 ad 3.

9 'Operatio vero qua solis sensibilibus inhaeret praeter intellectum et rationem, non est ejus inquantum est homo, sed secundum naturam quam cum brutis habet communem' (*De Ver.* 13.1).

10 *S. Thomae Aquinatis, In Librum De Causis Expositio* (Taurini, Romae: Marietti, 1955), pp. 14–16; *S.C.G.* II.68, 81; III.61 & IV.55; *De Anima* 1; *S.T.* I.77.2.

11 Plotinus in *Ennead* IV.8.1 expresses similar puzzlement about his out of body state.

12 *S.C.G.* III.48 & *S.T.* I-II.42.2 ad 3.

13 *S.C.G.* IV.79.

14 *S.C.G.* IV.81.

15 Cf. Aquinas's reply to the sixth objection: *S.C.G.* IV.81.

16 *S.T.* I.102.2 & 102.4.

17 *S.C.G.* IV.89.

18 Plato, towards the end of the *Phaedo* (108C), may offer the impure soul a way out when he tells us that after wandering alone in utter desolation 'until certain times have passed . . . it is borne away of necessity to its proper habitation'. However, the final statement is ambiguous.

19 *S.C.G.* IV.86.

20 Anton Pegis, 'Between Immortality and Death', *The Monist* Vol. 58, No. 1 (January 1974), pp. 1–15 (here p. 14). Luyten makes a similar point: cf. Norbert Luyten, 'The Significance of the Body in a Thomistic Anthropology', *Philosophy Today* Vol. 7, No. 3/4 (Fall 1963), pp. 175–93 (here pp. 184–5).

21 Cf. Simon Tugwell, O.P., *Human Immortality and the Redemption of Death* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1990), pp. 95–109.

22 *S.C.G.* II.81.

23 W. J. Hankey, *God in Himself* (Oxford University Press, 1987). Also cf. W. R. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus, Vol. 1* (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1923), p. 15, note 1, and W. R. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (London: Duckworth, 1972), pp. 167–9.

24 Cf. John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul and Life Everlasting* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), pp. 11–13.

25 Cf. Arthur Little, S.J., *The Platonic Heritage of Thomism* (Dublin: Golden Eagle Books, 1949).

26 Notably on the soul as constituting the boundary and horizon between the corporeal and spiritual and between time and eternity: cf. footnote 10 above. Also cf. Aquinas, *Liber De Causis*, pp. 14–16. The content of Propositio 2, Lectio 2 outlined in the latter pages appears to be based on Proclus's Propositions 189 & 190; see E. R. Dodds (trans. & comm.), *Proclus, The Elements of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), pp. 165–7 & pp. 297–8.

27 S. Tugwell, *Human Immortality and the Redemption of Death*, pp. 151–2.

28 Ibid., pp. 152–4.

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3. Barrett (n.2) 59.
4. Ibid.
5. At Linz he was taught by priests and got Excellent (*Vorzüglich*) in Religious Knowledge – his highest academic mark. See B. McGuinness, *Wittgenstein: A Life: The Young Ludwig, 1907-1921* (London: Duckworth, 1988) 51.
6. M. O'C. Drury, 'Conversations with Wittgenstein', in: R. Rhees, ed., *Recollections of Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) 179.
7. McGuinness (n.5) 48 - from notes preserved by Wittgenstein's executors.
8. N. Malcolm, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir, with a Biographical Sketch by George H. von Wright* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958) 95.
9. H. Wittgenstein, 'My Brother Ludwig', in: Rhees (n.6) 3.
10. L. Wittgenstein, *Notebooks 1914-1916*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1961) 91 (10.1.17).
11. A. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*, trans. B.B. Haldane and J. Kemp (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1883) 1:489-490.
12. McGuinness (n.5) 221.
13. McGuinness (n.5) 222.
14. McGuinness (n.5) 225.
15. McGuinness (n.5) 222.
16. Wittgenstein (n.10)82 (2.9.1916); see *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 5.62 - 5.641 on solipsism.
17. McGuinness (n.5) 221.
18. Ibid, trans. R. Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein. The Duty of Genius* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1990) 112; see Rhees (n.6) 172-209.
19. Monk (n.18) 138.
20. Monk (n.18) 103; McGuinness (n.5) 240.
21. Monk (n.18) 138.
22. Monk (n.18) 146.
23. Ibid.
24. Wittgenstein (n.10) 72-73 (11.6.1916).
25. Wittgenstein (n.10) 75-75 (8.7.1916).
26. McGuinness (n.5) 244-246.
27. Monk (n.18) 140-142.
28. McGuinness (n.5) 245.
29. B.F. McGuinness, ed., *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein with a Memoir by Paul Engelmann* (Oxford: Blackwell: 1967) 74.
30. McGuinness (n.5) 261.
31. McGuinness (n.5) 263.
32. Rhees (n.6) 149.
33. Monk (n.18) 480.
34. L. Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed., G.H. von Wright in collaboration with Heikki Nyman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980) 48-49. Hereafter cited as CV.
35. CV (n.34) 63.
36. CV (n.34) 87.
37. CV (n.34) 81.
38. CV (n.34) 86.
39. Ibid.
40. McGuinness (n.5) 166.
41. Monk (n.18) 427.

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THE INTERFACING IMAGE OF THE SOUL IN THE WRITINGS OF AQUINAS

Patrick Quinn

THE NEOPLATONIC IMAGE OF THE INTERFACING SOUL

The image of the soul as something that interfaces the dimensions of spirit and body, of eternity and of time, remains one of the most intriguing and vivid descriptions of the soul in Aquinas's writings. It is intriguing because of its links with Neoplatonism and is vivid because of its ability to suggest the ambience in which the soul operates. This image occurs in Thomas's commentary on *Liber de causis*, in *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2:68 & 81 and 4:55, *De Anima*, Q.1 and in *Summa theologiae* I, q.77, art.2.

What came to be known as *Liber de causis*, which summarized the thinking of Proclus, contributed to shaping the Neoplatonic character of Islamic thought and it would appear that Proposition 2 of this work attracted St Thomas's attention with the image of the soul as a horizon which is below eternity but above time. This conclusion is suggested by an examination of his commentary on *Liber de causis* and by the kind of language which he uses in the other texts, which are identified above, in which a similar image occurs.[1] The relevant text from *Liber de causis* reads as follows: '*Esse autem quod est post aeternitatem et supra tempus est Anima, quoniam est in horizonte aeternitatis inferius supra tempus.*'[2]

In his comments on this, Thomas illustrates what it means for the soul to attain the lowest grade of eternity above time by comparing it to a circle. He states that, just as the horizon terminates the boundary of a visible circle, which is below that of superior hemispheres, the soul itself is the ultimate boundary of eternity and of the principle of time.[3] The immediate origin of this image undoubtedly derives from Propositions 190 and 191 of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, which is the text on which *Liber de causis* is based. Prop. 190 states that 'every soul is intermediate between the indivisible principles and those which are divided in association with bodies'.[4] Dodd argues that, although

there is some dispute about the exact meaning of this phrase, it seems likely that Proclus himself understood 'the indivisible class as representing the intelligible world in its transcendent being and the divisible as its immanent manifestation . . . in the material world'.[5] Proposition 191 states that 'every participated soul has an eternal existence but a temporal activity'[6] and claims that 'every participated soul must be eternal in one regard and participate time in the other'.[7] Both Propositions 190 and 191 constitute the basis of Proposition 2 of *De causis.*

Dodd, in fact, suggests that this notion of the soul as a frontier between two worlds can be traced back to Plato's *Timaeus* (35 A) where it is said to be an intermediate being that is composed from 'the being which is indivisible and unchangeable and from that kind of being which is distributed among bodies'.[8] This image came to dominate the thinking of Neoplatonists like Philo and Plotinus. And in the *Enneads* for example, it is noticeable how frequently Plotinus is at pains to stress that the locus of the human soul is to be understood in terms of its interfacing the 'worlds here and there'. Gilson also tells us that Nemesius, who was sympathetic to Plato's thought, wrote about human beings existing on the border line of the world of spirits and the world of bodies.[9] But perhaps the most interesting of these descriptions of the soul is that which is provided by Avicenna. He describes the rational soul as having a practical and theoretical faculty which results in its facing two planes, one of which is higher and the other lower than itself:

> It has special faculties which establish the relationship between itself and each plane; the practical faculty which the human soul possesses in relation to the lower plane, which is the body and its control and management; and the theoretical faculty in relation to the higher plane, from which it passively receives and acquires intelligibles. It is as if our soul has two faces: one turned towards the body, and it must not be influenced by any requirements of the bodily nature; and the other turned towards the higher principles, and it must always be ready to receive from what is there in the higher plane and to be influenced by it.[10]

There are close similarities between Avicenna's interfacing image of the soul and that of Plotinus, whose views reached the Islamic world through the spurious *Theology* of Aristotle. Furthermore, despite Aquinas's differences with Avicenna, the latter's psychological views were undoubtedly influential in determining the Thomistic understanding of the soul as a spiritual substance which is the body's rational form.[11]

The attraction of this Neoplatonic image of the soul for Aquinas is further confirmed by his use of the circular metaphor which he employs in his comments on Proposition 2 of *De causis*. This metaphor is also found in *Summa contra gentiles*, 2:46 where he writes about the return of all creatures to their divine origin, especially the intelligences:

> For then is an effect most perfect when it returns to its source; wherefore of all figures the circle, and of all movements the circular, are the most perfect, because in them a return is made to the beginning. Hence, in order that the universe of creatures may attain its ultimate perfection, creatures must return to their principle.[12]

Both the content and language of this passage are redolent of Platonism. The use of the circular motif itself is characteristically found in both Plato and Plotinus. Plato's emphasis on the soul's return to its true home and the circular movement which structures his dialogues are examples of this. Likewise, Plotinus's concern for the soul's return to its source (*Ennead* 4.8.4 & 4.51) and his preference for circular analogies (*Ennead* 4.3.17) are in keeping with the Platonic traditional use of this metaphor.

AQUINAS'S USE OF THE BOUNDARY IMAGE OF THE SOUL

The Neoplatonic treatment of the soul in *De causis* provides Aquinas with the image of the soul as a medium between the spiritual and material in *Summa contra gentiles*, where the human being is also depicted, according to Hankey, 'as the sum of creation's elements'.[13] The first reference to this image is in Bk 2, Chap. 68 and appears to be a combination of Propositions 2 and 8 of *Liber de causis*. Chap. 68 discusses how an intellectual substance can be the form of the body and this is the background from which Aquinas's boundary reference to the soul derives. The human body, he maintains, is the most supreme in the category of bodies but the human soul is the lowest in the category of intellectual substances. We are left in no doubt about the cause of the human soul's low status. Its way of understanding, which occurs through sense-mediation, is responsible for its lowest place on the ladder of intelligent substances. We should note however that Aquinas qualifies this view in other places by adding that its mode of cognition is natural and appropriate for it.[14] However, a preference for direct knowledge which is not mediated by the senses can be adduced from his writings and this view is reflected in the boundary

image of the soul. Its location is depicted as follows: 'The intellectual soul is said to be on the horizon and confines of things corporeal and incorporeal inasmuch as it is an incorporeal substance, and yet the form of a body'.[15] This position is developed in its implications for his theory of knowledge in *Summa c.gent.* 2:81. The context of discussion here concerns the understanding of the soul when it is united with or separated from the body. The unity of soul and body means that knowledge is based on images from the senses (*phantasmata*) but this cannot continue after death. Instead, the separated soul will understand more perfectly because it is influenced by superior intelligences. This Neoplatonic image is further supported by what Aquinas has to say about withdrawal from the body. He maintains that such withdrawal makes possible a superior form of knowledge and he cites sleep and ecstasy in support of this view, claiming that these are examples of states where knowledge of the future can occur. In this condition of withdrawal from bodily things and reaching towards the world above, the soul is said to be 'on the boundary line of corporeal and incorporeal substances, as though it were on the horizon of eternity and time, by withdrawing from the lower world it approaches the higher'.[16] This is similar in some ways to the sentiments expressed at the end of *De anima*, Q.1 where Aquinas declares that if the soul's act of *esse* transcends the body and does not essentially depend on it, then the soul is constituted on the boundary line of corporeal and separate substances.[17]

The final reference in *Summa c. gent.* is in 4:55 which concerns a discussion on the incarnation of Christ. Here the boundary image is used to explain how human goodness has implications for all creatures: 'man is composed of a spiritual and corporeal nature, standing as it were on the boundaries of both, so that whatsoever is done for man's good would seem to affect all creatures'.[18]

Once again, the unique capacity of the human being to function as a linkage between the spiritual and the corporeal is identified as a special disposition, with an application, on this occasion, to the goodness of all creatures. This linkage is given another twist in S.T., I, 9, 77, art. 2, where it is described as the soul's ability to constitute a unifying centre of the physical and the spiritual powers.

ST THOMAS AND PLATONISM

Many Thomistic commentators have been reluctant to accept that

Aquinas's thinking could ever have been substantially influenced by Platonism. This view is now gradually changing in the light of the work of such writers as Little[19] and Hankey[20] among others. Inge had earlier remarked on Aquinas's greater intellectual closeness to Plotinus rather than to the real Aristotle and went on to say that 'as long as St Thomas Aquinas is the norm of scientific orthodoxy, the philosophy of the Church must remain predominantly Neoplatonic'.[21] I believe that Aquinas's concept of the soul in certain respects is indeed indebted to Neoplatonism and his use of the boundary image provides evidence. This would suggest that there might be good reasons for reappraising Aquinas's thinking in the light of Platonism and to question the conventional assumption that he obtained and developed his most important philosophical insights mainly from Aristotelianism. His use of the Neoplatonic boundary image of the soul as a unique bridge between the physical and spiritual worlds is certainly effective in depicting the tension that must be inherent in this kind of bonding and it also enables us to appreciate the nature of the difficulties that are involved in theoretically accounting for the soul's ambivalent character.

NOTES

1. See A. Pegis, 'The Separated Soul and Its Nature in St Thomas', in: A. Maurer, ed., *St Thomas Aquinas 1274-1974 Commemorative Studies,* vol. 1 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1974) 133-134, n.7.
2. *In librum de causis expositio s. Thomae Aquinatis* (Turin: Marietti, 1955) 14.
3. Ibid., 16.
4. Proclus, *The Elements of Theology,* trans. and commentary by E.R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933) 166-167.
5. Proclus (n.4) 298.
6. Proclus (n.4) 167.
7. Proclus (n.4) 169.
8. Proclus (n.4) 297-298.
9. E. Gilson, *History of Western Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1955) 60.
10. *Avicenna's Psychology,* trans. F. Rahman (London: Oxford University Press, 1952) 33.
11. See S.F. Afnan, *Avicenna* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1958) 275.
12. *Summa c. Gent* 2:46, trans. English Dominican Frs, 4 vols (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1923-29) 2:109.
13. W.J. Hankey, *God in Himself* (Oxford: Univ. Press, 1987) 32.
14. See *Summa theol.* I, q.89, art. 1.
15. *Summa c. Gent.* 2:68: Et inde est quod anima intellectualis dicitur esse quasi

quidem horizon et confinium corporeorum et incorporeorum, in quantum est substantia incorporea, corporis tamen forma. (Trans. (n.12) 2:172-173).

16. *Summa c. Gent.* 2:81 (trans. (n.12) 2:231).
17. *De anima*, q.1: Manifestum est quod ipsa est in confinio corporalium et separatarum substantiarum constituta.
18. *Summa c. Gent.* 4:55 (trans. (n.12) 4:205).
19. A. Little, *The Platonic Heritage of Thomism* (Dublin: Golden Eagle Books, 1949).
20. Hankey (n.13).
21. W.R. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., ²1923) 1:15.

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TIME, DESIRE AND NARRATIVE MEANING[1]

William Mathews, S.J.

In the last decade of the present millennium time and narrative stand out as two of the great and major themes in which the human community of scholars, and I use that term widely, have become interested. Our awareness of time has expanded unimaginably from earlier perspectives and the present literature on the topic is enormous. Narrative, whose history lies largely outside of the mainstream of philosophy, has in recent times begun to attract the philosophical attention it deserves as a central human category, especially from the viewpoint of human temporality. There is currently a certain excitement in their study. There is a sense that some new windows have sprung open, surprising us with the vastness of the views to be explored. Against that background the present essay will put forward a suggestion about a possible relation between time and narrative. The aim will be to see if a plausible case can be made for the suggestion that, in certain respects, human desire in time is a narrative or story form.

I

Time, the primitive experience of duration, of the duration of our experience and the duration of what we experience, of the inescapable slipping of the present into the past and the future into the present, seems to be an irreducible quality or attribute of everything in our world. As such it shares in the mysteriousness of everything that is. Whether there is a pure form of time is an interesting question. But different entities, stones, plants, animals, humans, history, the universe, have different forms in time. The paper will focus on what might be significant about the human experience and form of time and equally, of the human way of relating to time. Some brief remarks on cosmic, cultural and psychological time - the time of our souls - will set the stage.