

Aquinas as Interpreter of Augustinian Illumination in Light of Albertus Magnus

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THOMAS AQUINAS interpreted Augustine's doctrine of noetic illumination in a way that manifests both the significant influence of the early Albertus Magnus and Thomas's originality. The young Albert set clear precedents for one of the pillars of his student's anthropology. Yet the mature Aquinas also went beyond the framework set by his teacher and thus attained a fuller historical awareness of the distance between his own epistemology and that of Augustine.

Much work remains to be done on the relation between Albert and Aquinas in the area of philosophical and theological anthropology.¹ There has been a widespread assumption that these two Dominican friars engaged in radically different projects. For example, Étienne Gilson concluded that the early Albert's teaching on the mind's illumination remained essentially Augustinian, so that Aquinas's teaching presents a break with his master.² In our own day, important voices in the area of Albert scholarship have identified Dietrich von Freiberg, Meister Eckhart, and other medieval German Dominicans as the true successors of Albert. These historians maintain that Aquinas essentially departed from his teacher's thought on central anthropological issues.³ I will

¹ Henryk Anzulewicz, introduction to Albertus Magnus, *Über den Menschen*, Philosophische Bibliothek 531 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 2004), xliii.

² Étienne Gilson, *Pourquoi saint Thomas a critiqué saint Augustin*, Vrin Reprise (Paris: Vrin, 1986), 121.

³ See Kurt Flasch, *Meister Eckhart: Die Geburt der 'Deutschen Mystik' aus dem Geist der arabischen Philosophie* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2006), 67–89, 108; Alain de Libera, *Métaphysique et noétique: Albert le Grand* (Paris: Vrin, 2006), 17.

propose that Aquinas's treatment of Augustinian illumination manifests a significant debt to his mentor, while his doctrinal developments in this area seem to continue key aspects of Albert's project.

I will begin by setting the historical context for the early Albert and Aquinas. Second, I will examine Aquinas's treatment of illumination during two periods of his career: (a) his Parisian sojourn as bachelor in the early 1250s; and (b) his Roman regency in 1265–68.

Thomas Aquinas, Student of Albert

Aquinas resided with Albert at the Priory of Saint Jacques in Paris from 1246 until 1248.⁴ The young Italian had already been introduced to Aristotle in Naples, which prepared him well for Albert's mentorship. Sometime before 1243, the latter had composed a heavily Aristotelian work, the *De homine*. The bulk of the text consists of a philosophical treatise on the soul, within which Albert offers an extensive synthesis of the Stagirite's philosophy.⁵ The work almost functions as a commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*. The philosophical study of the soul is followed by a very brief theological section on themes such as the *imago Dei*. Thomas would have had ready access to a copy of the *De homine* at Saint Jacques.⁶ He would hardly have ignored such an important study of Aristotelian philosophy. The *De homine* was Albert's most important anthropological treatise before his Parisian commentary on the Lombard's *Sentences*. At the very latest, Aquinas's second Parisian sojourn (1252–59) would have provided him ample opportunity to ponder crucial questions in Aristotelian anthropology with the help of his teacher's work. In the *De homine*, Albert manifests

⁴ Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1: *The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 6–8, 24; Ruedi Imbach and Adriano Oliva, O.P., *La philosophie de Thomas d'Aquin: Repères* (Paris: Vrin, 2009), 16; James A. Weisheipl, O.P., "Albert der Große: Leben und Werke," in *Albertus Magnus: Sein Leben und seine Bedeutung*, ed. Manfred Entrich, O.P. (Cologne: Styria, 1980), 21.

⁵ For the date, see Henryk Anzulewicz and Joachim R. Söder, preface to Albertus Magnus, *De homine*, Cologne edition, vol. 27.2 (Münster: Aschendorff, 2008), xv.

⁶ Manuscript P. For the date and manuscript locations of the *De homine*, see H. Anzulewicz and J. R. Söder, preface to Albertus Magnus, *De homine*, xv, xix. Anzulewicz points to the many similarities between the anthropologies of Aquinas and Albert's *De homine*. See his introduction to Albertus Magnus, *Über den Menschen*, xliii–iv. The following comment by Anzulewicz is particularly striking: "Nicht erforscht ist bisher der Einfluß der Albertinischen Anthropologie auf Thomas von Aquin. Erst mit der Erschließung von *De homine* zeigt sich, daß Thomas von Aquin seinem Lehrer im wesentlichen gefolgt ist. Die Seelenlehre des Thomas . . . findet sich bei seinem Lehrer in *De homine* bereits systematisch entfaltet" (xliii).

an evident enthusiasm for an Arabic-Aristotelian form of epistemology. He also proposes a very reductive reading of Augustinian illumination.⁷ He essentially replaces Augustinian memory with a somewhat exalted vision of the agent intellect. For example, in the *De homine*, Albert essentially ignores Augustinian memory as he develops a fairly complete philosophical doctrine of how we know the world and the soul. The theme of memory is important, for in the thought of Augustine it is the site of the mind's illumination.⁸ I will return to the *De homine* treatment of illumination shortly.

Albert lectured on the Lombard's *Sentences* sometime between 1243 and 1245, though he continued to edit the written version through the year 1249.⁹ In this work, Albert turns to a much more Augustinian type of epistemology, yet also fuses it with important elements of the Aristotelian tradition. For example, the German Dominican adopts Aristotle as a reliable guide for how we understand material beings, but turns to Augustine to explain how we know God and immaterial realities, including the human soul. Albert clearly affirms Augustine's principle that the very presence of immaterial realities in the mind stretches the human subject's cognitive capacities, so that immaterial realities can be better known than corporeal

⁷ I follow the standard contemporary reading of noetic illumination in Augustine, as expounded by (among others) Ronald H. Nash, *The Light of the Mind: St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (Lima, OH: Academic Renewal Press, 2003). For other studies on Augustinian illumination, see the notes in my "How the Early Albertus Magnus Transformed Augustinian Interiority," *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 58 (2011): 351–54.

⁸ *De homine*, "De Intellectu Possibile," 440–42 offers an essentially Aristotelian treatment of memory and only cites Augustine for his teaching on the memory of the imagination. However, Albert's doctrine of the agent intellect is more influenced by an Arabic Platonic reading of Aristotle than is the doctrine of Thomas. See H. Anzulewicz, introduction to Albertus Magnus, *Über den Menschen*, xlv. See also his recent study of Augustinian illumination in Albert, which mostly complements my own reading of the Universal Doctor: "Rezeption und Reinterpretation: Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, die Peripatetiker und die Umdeutung der augustinschen Illuminationslehre bei Albertus Magnus," in *Kulturkontakte und Rezeptionsvorgänge in der Theologie des 12. und 13. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Ulrich Köpf and Dieter R. Bauer, *Archa Verbi: Subsidia* 8 (Münster: Aschendorff, 2011), 109–17.

⁹ On the date of Albert's commentary on the *Sentences*, see Walter Senner, O.P., *Alberts des Großen Verständnis von Theologie und Philosophie*, *Lectio Albertina* 9 (Münster: Aschendorff, 2009), 5–6, 14; Simon Tugwell, O.P., *Albert and Thomas: Selected Writings*, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 3–11; James A. Weisheipl, O.P., *Thomas d'Aquino and Albert His Teacher* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1980), 3–6, 11; idem, "Albert der Große: Leben und Werke," 18–26.

realities, a doctrine that goes hand-in-hand with Augustinian illumination. On the other hand, Albert's overall stance on illumination in the commentary on the *Sentences* remains somewhat ambiguous. His preference for Aristotle in the account of how we know the material world cannot be fully reconciled with Augustine.¹⁰ Thomas periodically consulted his teacher's commentary on the *Sentences* while writing his own.¹¹

From 1248 to 1251, Aquinas attended Albert's Cologne lectures on the whole corpus of the Pseudo-Dionysius. Thomas kept these course notes for the rest of his life.¹² The anthropological doctrine of Albert's commentaries on Dionysius marks a veritable theological turning point. Albert essentially replaces a more or less Augustinian vision of the human being that he had taught in his commentary on the *Sentences* with a much more Dionysian and Platonized Aristotelian approach. He strongly emphasizes that the human being's natural place in the cosmos is as a body-soul composite designed to ascend to God indirectly, through the sensible mediations of creation and the Bible, in contrast to Augustine's much more internal, immediate path to God.¹³ Albert's Dionysian

¹⁰ Albertus Magnus, *Commentarii in I Sententiarum* [henceforth *In I Sent.*], Borgnet edition, vol. 25 (Paris, 1893), d. 2, a. 5, pp. 59b–60a; d. 17, a. 4c, p. 472.

¹¹ Gilles Emery, O.P., *La Trinité créatrice: Trinité et création dans les commentaires aux Sentences de Thomas d'Aquin et de ses précurseurs Albert le Grand et Bonaventure*, Bibliothèque Thomiste 47 (Paris: Vrin, 1995), 30.

¹² Maria Burger, "Thomas Aquinas' Glosses on the Dionysius Commentaries of Albert the Great in Codex 30 of the Cologne Cathedral Library," in *Via Alberti: Texte—Quellen—Interpretationen*, ed. Ludger Honnefelder, Hannes Möhle, and Susana Bullido del Barrio, Subsidia Albertina 2 (Münster: Aschendorff, 2009), 572–74; Adriano Oliva, O.P., *Les débuts de l'enseignement de Thomas d'Aquin et sa conception de la 'sacra doctrina', avec l'édition du prologue de son Commentaire des Sentences*, Bibliothèque Thomiste 58 (Paris: Vrin, 2006), 218–20; J.-P. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, 25.

¹³ In his commentaries on Dionysius, Albert endorses much of the Areopagite's epistemology of mediation as he passes over the Augustinian alternative of direct interior noetic ascent to God. See Albertus Magnus, *Super Dionysium De caelesti hierarchia*, Cologne edition, vol. 36.1, ed. Paul Simon and Wilhelm Kübel (Münster: Aschendorff, 1993), ch. 1, pp. 7.40–42, 12.28–31, 12.66–73, 13.36–45; ch. 2, pp. 16.74–17.3, 17.38–42, 22.67–72; idem, *Super Dionysium De ecclesiastica hierarchia*, Cologne edition, vol. 36.2, ed. Maria Burger, Paul Simon and Wilhelm Kübel (Münster: Aschendorff, 1999), ch. 4, p. 97.56–68. In his commentary on Dionysius's ninth letter, Albert notes that recourse to sense experience helps us to grasp immaterial realities, even in the case of prophetic visions. This conclusion stands in contrast to Albert's *In I Sent.*, d. 17, a. 4, where the body darkens or obscures the soul's knowledge of the immaterial realm. See Albertus Magnus, *Super Dionysii Mysticam theologiam et Epistulas*, Cologne edition, vol. 37.2, ed. Paul Simon (Münster: Aschendorff, 1972), *Epistula* 9, p. 539.3–13. On Albert's rejection

cosmology became central to the theology of Aquinas, even as early as the Angelic Doctor's commentary on the *Sentences*.

Illumination in Aquinas's Commentary on the Lombard's *Sentences*

In Aquinas's commentary on the *Sentences*, the key passage on Augustinian illumination is found in book 2, distinction 28, article 5. Thomas asks whether any knowledge is possible without grace. He answers:

Some truths are proportioned to natural reason, whereas others exceed it. Whatever [truth] cannot be reached through conclusions attained from self-evident principles exceeds natural reason. . . . Such are the things that pertain to faith, and future contingents. . . . But if we are speaking about the truths which are proportioned to natural reason, there is a twofold opinion about this. Some say that the agent intellect is one for all human beings, that God is the agent intellect . . . thus, any intelligible cannot be understood without a new emission of the spiritual ray, which is grace freely given (*gratia gratis data*). But this position is not fitting, as was said above [in distinction 17] . . . yet even supposing this position [of one separate or divine intellect], a new infusion of grace would not be necessary for any true cognition. For the infusion and emanation of spiritual gifts is not successive, in the way of motion, but rather fixed and permanent. Hence, by one spiritual outpouring, the possible intellect is perfected to know all things proportioned to it. Another opinion is that the agent intellect is a power of the soul. For this position to stand, it cannot be rationally maintained that the cognition of truth about which we are speaking would require the infusion of yet another light . . . unless the agent intellect were insufficient for this [its operation of abstracting species]. Thus, human nature would be less perfect than other natures and would not suffice to carry out its own natural operations. Therefore, it must be said that these truths

of knowledge by (Augustinian) assimilation to an object's properties in favor of information (Aristotle and perhaps Dionysius), see *Super Dionysium De caelesti hierarchia*, ch. 2, pp. 16.74–17.3, 17.38–42. On Albert's rejection of (Augustine's) knowledge by the interior presence of the known reality, see ch. 2, p. 18.7–11, 18.39–42, and especially *Super Dionysii Mysticam theologiam*, ch. 2, pp. 466.87–467.11 (cited and analyzed below). On the soul's union with the body as its natural place in the cosmic hierarchy, see Albertus Magnus, *Super Dionysium De divinis nominibus*, Cologne edition, vol. 37.1, ed. Paul Simon (Münster: Aschendorff, 1972), ch. 4, p. 179.45–64. On our indirect and thus limited knowledge of God in this life, see ch. 2, p. 81.27–38; ch. 7, p. 358.6–7. See also my essay "How the Early Albertus Magnus Transformed Augustinian Interiority," 351–86.

[proportioned to human nature] can be known through the natural light of the agent intellect, without any super-added light of grace.¹⁴

The article's title considers grace as freely given, a category distinct from sanctifying grace. Thomas begins his response by underscoring the distinction between the realm of nature and the realm of grace. Whatever conclusions can be attained by reasoning philosophically from first principles and the intrinsic, created capacity of the agent intellect pertain to reason. Thomas invokes what may be the key theological principle without which his own epistemology would be impossible. That is, he places

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, bk. II [henceforth *In II Sent.*] (Paris: Sumptibus P. Lethielleux, 1929), d. 28, q. 1, a. 5c, pp. 731–32: "... verorum quaedam sunt naturali ratione proportionata, quaedam naturalem rationem excedunt. Illa naturalem rationem excedunt quae non possunt concludi ex primis principiis per se notis . . . Huiusmodi autem sunt ea quae fidei sunt, et futura contingentia . . . Si autem loquamur de illis veris quae naturali rationi proportionata sunt, sciendum est quod circa hoc est duplex opinio. Quidam enim dicunt, ut supra dictum est, quod intellectus agens est unus omnium, intellectum agentem Deum esse dicentes . . . ita non possit intelligi aliquid intelligibile sine nova emissionem radii spiritualis, qui est gratia gratis data. Sed haec positio conueniens non est, ut supra dictum est [d. 17, q. 2, a. 1] . . . Nec tamen oportet, hac positione supposita, ut semper nova infusio gratiae fieret in cuiuslibet veri cognitione; eo quod infusio et emanatio spiritualium donorum non est successiva per modum motus; sed est fixa et permanens; unde secundum unam irradiationem spiritualem, intellectus possibilis ad omnia sibi proportionata cognoscenda perficeretur. Aliorum vero opinio est quod intellectus agens sit quaedam potentia animae rationalis; et hanc sustinendo, non potest rationabiliter poni quod oporteat ad cognitionem veri, talis de quo loquimur, aliquod aliud lumen superinfundi . . . nisi forte dicatur quod intellectus agens insufficiens est ad hoc; et ita natura humana aliis imperfectior esset, quae non sibi sufficeret in naturalibus operationibus. Et ideo dicendum est quod haec vera, sine omni lumine gratiae superaddito, per lumen naturale intellectus agentis cognosci possunt." All translations are my own. For Augustinian illumination in Aquinas, see Édouard Wéber, O.P., *Dialogue et dissensions entre saint Bonaventure et saint Thomas d'Aquin à Paris* (1252–1273), Bibliothèque Thomiste 41 (Paris: Vrin, 1974), 400–58; P. Faucon de Boylesve, "Aspects augustiniens de la noétique thomiste," in *Tommaso d'Aquino nel suo settimo centenario: Atti del Congresso Internazionale*, vol. 1: *Tommaso d'Aquino nella storia del pensiero*, 1: *Le fonti del pensiero di S. Tommaso*, ed. Pontificia Accademia Romana di San Tommaso d'Aquino (Naples: Edizioni Domenicane Italiane, 1975), 222–31; Pierre-Yves Maillard, *La vision de Dieu chez Thomas d'Aquin*, Bibliothèque Thomiste 53 (Paris: Vrin, 2001), 118–21; Cruz González Ayesta, "El intelecto agente en Santo Tomás: Lumen y Habito," in *Intellect et imagination dans la Philosophie Médiévale*, ed. Maria Cândida Pacheco and José Francisco Meirinhos, Actes du 9ième Congrès International de Philosophie Médiévale, Rencontres de Philosophie Médiévale 11.3 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2006), 1405–16.

the limited yet real autonomy of the human intellect with its own permanent capacity to know some truth about God and the world within the context of the grace/nature distinction. In God's design, some truths have been "proportioned to reason." The grace/nature distinction is one of the distinguishing marks of Aquinas's thought. In the present text, Aquinas implies that this distinction ultimately requires an epistemology other than Augustinian illumination.¹⁵

Aquinas seems to have found the connection between grace/nature and the mind's illumination in the works of Albert. In the *De homine*, Albert develops an extensive philosophical epistemology on the basis of Aristotle's agent and possible intellects. In the long philosophical section of the *De homine*, Albert's arguments proceed on the basis of philosophical reasoning, while theological authorities are treated as debate partners equal in authority to the non-Christian philosophers that Albert cites.¹⁶ Only when Albert turns to properly theological themes such as the *imago Dei* does he grant theological authorities greater weight. The methodology of the entire *De homine* operates on a clear grace/nature distinction.

In the same work, Albert also explicitly proposes a connection between grace/nature and illumination. He notes that some truths are accessible to us only through God's grace, which illumines the mind. These truths are "above reason." However, other things are understood rationally, that is, through the natural power of the agent intellect without any special divine illumination.¹⁷ The similarity with Aquinas's opening argument is striking.¹⁸

¹⁵ Hence, John Milbank's attempt to blur or even erase the grace/nature distinction in Aquinas by an appeal to the latter's adoption of Augustinian illumination misses the mark. See his "Truth and Vision," in John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 19–59, esp. 21.

¹⁶ Joachim R. Söder, "Die Erprobung der Vernunft: Vom Umgang mit Traditionen in *De homine*," in *Albertus Magnus, Zum Gedenken nach 800 Jahren: Neue Zugänge, Aspekte und Perspektiven*, ed. Walter Sennner, O.P., Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte des Dominikanerordens 10 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001), 5, 8.

¹⁷ *De homine*, "De Intellectu Agente," a. 2.2.3, ad 22, p. 415.30–36: "Ad ultimum dicendum quod vis est in hoc quod dicit Apostolus: 'Non quod sufficientes simus cogitare aliquid ex nobis quasi a nobis'. In hoc innuit quod quaedam intelligibilia non intelligimus nisi gratia dei illuminante, sicut ea quae sunt supra rationem; quaedam autem rationabilia intelligimus a nobis, sed non quasi ex nobis, sed ex virtute agentis intellectus, quae data est nobis a deo." On the distinction between faith and reason in Albert, see Édouard Wéber, O.P., "La relation de la philosophie et de la théologie selon Albert le Grand," *Archives de Philosophie* 43 (1980): 559–88.

¹⁸ In the Dionysian Commentaries, Albert also distinguishes between universal or natural illumination and particular illumination through grace. See his *Super Dionysium De caelesti hierarchia*, ch. 1, p. 7.40–42.

Thomas then proceeds to refute the illumination theory of neo-Augustinian theologians such as William of Auvergne and Roger Bacon, who identified God with the agent intellect.¹⁹ Aquinas's first argument pertains to an excess of human passivity. Since he returns to it at the end of the article's corpus, I will treat this argument below. Second, Thomas argues that, even if God were the cosmic agent intellect, the outpouring of intelligible light is not an action that varies from one moment to another. Rather, God's action is "fixed and permanent."

Aquinas follows Albert as he quietly replaces an Augustinian notion of illumination with a Proclan-Dionysian notion, though the early Albert and the early Aquinas considered Aristotle to be the author of the *Liber de causis*, their main (indirect) source of Proclan thought. For Augustine, moral rectitude conditions even the light needed for philosophical insight. But in a Proclan-Dionysian universe, noetic illumination consists of a permanent cosmic gift that constitutes a fixed hierarchy of being wherein each member enjoys relatively stable operational capacities. Augustine's philosopher is a radically historical being who can ascend to great contemplative heights, even to a partial direct vision of God in this life, yet can also descend to the abyss of utter ignorance. The intellectual universe of Dionysius and the *Liber de causis* is far more stable. Here, the philosopher's journey is less perilous but also more limited in its possibilities, precisely because his intellectual capacity is a stable metaphysical gift from God.²⁰

In his commentaries on the Areopagite, Albert endorses a Dionysian universe of fixed hierarchies and natures, including its doctrine of light. Dionysian light is both a permanent gift directly received from God and a historical gift mediated by angels and sensible veils. These veils or mediations of divine light include creation, the Bible, and the liturgy. But Augustinian light is especially encountered within, by turning away from

¹⁹ Christian Trottman, *La vision béatifique: Des disputes scolastiques à sa définition par Benoît XII*, Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 248 (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1995), 151; Édouard Wéber, O.P., *La personne humaine au XIIIe siècle*, Bibliothèque Thomiste 46 (Paris:Vrin, 1991), 337–38.

²⁰ Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, 2nd ed., trans. E. R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), prop. 173, 177, 194–95. See also Dodds's notes (299–300) in the same work, as well as Lucas Siorvanes, *Proclus: Neo-Platonic Philosophy and Science* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), 126, 141. For the Latin *Liber de causis*, see the text printed in Thomas Aquinas, *Super librum de causis expositio*, rev. ed., ed. Henri-Dominique Saffrey, O.P., Textes philosophiques du Moyen Âge 21 (Paris:Vrin, 2002). On this key difference between Augustine and Dionysius, see Richard Schenk, O.P., "From Providence to Grace: Thomas Aquinas and the Platonisms of the Mid-Thirteenth Century," *Nova et Vetera* 3 (2005): 307–20.

the sensible world. An entire cosmology stands behind Thomas's phrase "fixed and permanent light." Aquinas's response to the neo-Augustinians proposes a pseudo-Aristotelian (but actually neo-Platonic) doctrine of noetic light that is more structural than Augustine's. Aquinas still employs the language of light, but its meaning has shifted significantly. Albert probably taught him to employ this strategy specifically for the theme of noetic light, a claim to which I will return shortly.²¹

The closing argument of the corpus responds to the second type of Augustinian illumination, which is reminiscent of Bonaventure.²² Here, the human being possesses his or her own agent intellect but still needs the gift of divine light in order to attain sure knowledge of truth. Thomas's answer brings us back to his first response to William of Auvergne and Roger Bacon earlier in the corpus. These opponents' doctrine leaves the human person without an adequate capacity to carry out his or her own natural operation, namely, the discovery of philosophical truth. The human being would thus lack a basic created gift that is possessed by all other corporeal creatures, namely, the ability to act according to one's intrinsic form. Thomas insists on locating the human being within an ordered hierarchy of creatures, within a hierarchy of agents. A consideration of human knowledge must grant this cosmic perspective as much weight as our relation to the divine cause and giver of light. The human being must always be considered in this twofold context, never one without the other. Here, one of Aquinas's most fundamental theological convictions manifests itself. It is more characteristically Dionysian than Augustinian. Thomas had observed Albert's systematic affirmation of the same principle in Cologne, in the German Dominican's lectures on Dionysius.

However, the insistence on the actualization of the creature's intrinsic operational capacity as its proper dignity and perfection is much more noticeable in Aquinas than in the early Albert. The latter never seems to employ this argument in his critique of Augustinian illumination, either in the *De homine* or in the Dionysian commentaries. Aquinas returns to it again and again. It exemplifies how Thomas brings argumentative depth to Albert's project of constructing an Aristotelian-Dionysian alternative to Augustinian illumination and interiority. Thomas creatively synthesizes two elements: (1) John Damascene's principle that grants each creature its proper activity; and (2) a Dionysian cosmic hierarchy in which each creature stands in relation to the whole of the universe.

²¹ At *De homine*, p. 415.25–29, which I consider at the end of this section.

²² Bonaventure, *Commentarius in librum Secundum Sententiarum*, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 2 (Quaracchi: Ex Typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1885), d. 24, p. 1, a. 2, q. 4.

The corpus of Aquinas's commentary on the *Sentences* passage on illumination never mentions Augustine. Thomas's primary opponents are thirteenth-century neo-Augustinians. But he cannot avoid Augustine altogether. The third objection invokes the doctrine of the *De magistro* that God alone is the interior teacher. Thus, all learning seems to involve some type of graced divine aid. Thomas responds:

... therefore, it is said that God alone teaches, because he contains and causes the power of understanding in us. This does not mean that a new light of grace is infused in any cognition of truth. God contains and causes in diverse modes when angels and men are said to teach, as was said above in distinction 9.²³

Aquinas essentially replaces Augustinian illumination with the doctrine that God is the creative, exclusive first cause of all knowing, a gift that the Creator continues to pour out as he sustains human beings and all things in their proper being. The appeal to God's primary causality is a standard argument that Aquinas employs throughout his career in relation to illumination.

The shift in meaning is daring. Thomas concludes the text by referring back to distinction 9 of book 2 in the commentary on the *Sentences*, where he treats the same issue, namely, Augustine's doctrine that God alone is the true interior teacher. In distinction 9, the beginning of Thomas's response confirms its philosophical inspiration. He states that in natural actions, lower beings have their efficacy of operation from the first cause, which impresses its operation in the effect more intensely than does the lower agent. Likewise, the human mind's capacity to act is possible only through the power of the first cause that illuminates it. This is why God is called the teacher of all. But God's primary causality does not exclude the activity of lower agents.²⁴ Thomas's philosophical inspiration is clearly the *Liber de causis* (especially its first proposition), with its ordered Proclan world of higher and lower causes, which also stands

²³ Thomas Aquinas, *In II Sent.*, d. 28, q. 1, a. 5, ad 3, pp. 732–33: “. . . ergo dicitur ipse solus Deus docere, quia vim intelligendi in nobis continet et causat; non ex hoc quod in qualibet cognitione veritatis novum lumen gratiae superinfundat. Qualiter autem diversimode Deus, angeli et homo docere dicuntur, dictum est supra, dist. IX.”

²⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *In II Sent.*, d. 9, q. 1, a. 2, ad 4, p. 231: “Ad quartum dicendum, quod sicut in actionibus naturalibus inferius agens non habet efficaciam in productione effectus nisi per virtutem agentis primi, quae vehementius imprimit in effectum, ita etiam in intellectualibus inferior illuminans nihil potest efficere nisi per virtutem primi illuminantis: et propter hoc ipse Deus est qui omnes docet; nec tamen excluditur ab aliis illuminatio, sicut nec ab agentibus naturalibus naturalis actio.”

behind Dionysius. The same philosophy underlies the discussion of the fixed, permanent gift of light in the corpus of distinction 28. In the response to objection 3, the reference back to distinction 9 signals that Proclan light also replaces Augustinian light in Thomas's analysis of the *De magistro*.

Thomas probably did not yet recognize the immense doctrinal distance between the historical Augustine and his own epistemology. Yet Aquinas was hardly the first scholastic to interpret the Latin Father somewhat loosely. Albert had certainly done so, and for precisely the same reason. In the *De homine* text that directly precedes the rejection of special illumination mentioned above, Albert tackles the same excerpt from Augustine's *De magistro*. According to an objection, God alone teaches; therefore, he imparts a new gift of light whenever we learn. Albert responds that God enlightens every mind in that he is the first cause, without whom we can do nothing, and that this is what Augustine intends to teach in the *De magistro*. But, Albert continues, this does not exclude the human being's intrinsic capacity to understand, that is, to know without special illumination.²⁵ Albert's response is virtually identical to that of Aquinas.

Let us note three important elements in Albert's solution: (1) he reinterprets Augustine's intention; (2) he invokes primary causality, a causality that is creative and universal; and (3) he preserves the intrinsic operational capacity of secondary causes. Here too, Proclan cosmology replaces Augustine's. It seems that Albert taught Aquinas how to reinterpret Augustine, namely, by changing the meaning of key terms such as *illumination* and *causality*. A crucial scholastic shift from Augustinian to Proclan-Dionysian noetic light, from special illumination to secondary causality, occurs in the early Albert, and Aquinas follows him.²⁶ In the mid-1240s, Albert proposes a daring reinterpretation of a key Augustinian doctrine whereby he challenges the reigning neo-Augustinian noetics of the Paris theologians. The significance of this doctrinal turn would hardly have gone unnoticed by our young Italian student of Aristotelian anthropology.

²⁵ *De homine*, "De Intellectu Agente," a. 2.2.3, obj. 21, p. 411.29–33: "In idem videtur incidere Augustinus in libro *De magistro*, ubi per totum probat nihil posse hominem intelligere nisi deus doceat interius. Cum igitur omnis intellectus sit a lumine intellectus agentis, videtur intellectus agens nihil aliud esse quam deus instruens interius." Ad 21, p. 415.25–29: "Ad aliud dicendum quod Augustinus in libro *De magistro* intendit quod omne lumen nostri intellectus est a causa prima et sine ipso nihil possumus facere; sed naturam illuminandi super intelligibilia intellectus agens habet ab ipso et sub ipso."

²⁶ Might Albert have found this interpretation of Augustine in the works of another scholastic philosopher or theologian?

Aquinas's *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis* on Illumination

Numerous works from the middle of Aquinas's career contain little more than brief discussions of noetic illumination. These texts mostly repeat the teaching of the commentary on the *Sentences*. Not until the *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis* does Thomas again take up illumination in any detail; this new focus is also found in the contemporary treatment of epistemology in the *Summa theologiae*.²⁷ Article 10 of the *De spiritualibus creaturis* deals with the individuality of the agent intellect, a topic that often gives rise to a discussion of illumination. Aquinas does not mention the Bishop of Hippo until the eighth objection. Here, Thomas raises one of Augustine's crucial epistemological claims, namely, that sense experience of a mutable, created world is not a sufficiently stable source for reliable truth judgments.²⁸ Aquinas responds:

... In order to inquire more deeply into Augustine's intention, and how truth is attained here [in the power of judgment], it must be known that some ancient philosophers, who did not propose [the existence of] another cognitive power beyond the senses or [the existence of] beings beyond sensibles, said that we cannot have any certain truth. [They said] this for two reasons. First, some maintained that sensibles are always in flux and that there is nothing stable in them. Second, diverse persons judge differently in the same situations. . . . These are the two arguments that Augustine touches upon. . . . Plato agreed with the ancient philosophers that sensibles are always in flux . . . [but] he posited, on the one hand, that the species of things are separate from sensibles and [are] immutable . . . on the other hand, he [Plato] posited a cognitive power in the human being that is above the senses, namely the mind or intellect, [which is] illumined by some superior intelligible light, just as sight is illumined by the visible sun. But Augustine, who followed Plato as much

²⁷ This work is contemporaneous with the *prima pars* of the *Summa theologiae* (1266/1268). See J.-P. Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, 173.

²⁸ For the relation of sense experience and noetic certitude in Augustine, see his explanation of why the soul has the capacity to remember at *Retractationum libri II*, ed. Almut Mutzenbecher, CCSL 57 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1984), bk. I, ch. 8.2, p. 22: "Fieri enim potest . . . quia natura intellegibilis est et conecitur non solum intellegibilibus, uerum etiam immutabilibus rebus, eo ordine facta, ut cum se ad eas res mouet quibus conexas est uel ad se ipsam, in quantum eas uidet, in tantum de his uera respondeat." See also his *De Magistro*, CCSL 29 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1984), bk. XIV, ch. 46; Robert Crouse, "Knowledge," in *Augustine Through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald and John C. Cavadini (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 486–88; John Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 77–78.

as the Catholic faith allowed him to, did not maintain that the species of things subsist by themselves. Rather, in their place, he posited the ideas of things in the divine mind, and that through them, by the [human] mind illumined with divine light, we judge [the truth of] all things, not that we see the ideas themselves, which would be impossible without seeing the essence of God [in this life]. Rather, [we judge the truth of things] insofar as these supreme ideas are impressed in our minds. Thus, Plato posited [the realization of] the knowledge of the separate species, not that the species themselves are seen, but that insofar as our mind participates them, it has knowledge of things. . . . But Aristotle proceeded by another way. First, he shows in many ways that there is something stable in sensible beings. . . . Third, he shows that beyond the senses there is an intellectual power that judges about the truth, and not through some intelligibles existing outside of it, but through the light of the agent intellect, which makes intelligibles. But he did not have much to say about the intelligibles themselves participating God, or that the light making intelligibles participates [in divine light].²⁹

Thomas pursues a better understanding of Augustine's intention regarding reliable or certain truth judgments. For this purpose, he explores the

²⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis* [henceforth SC], Leonine edition, vol. 24.2, ed. J. Cos (Paris: Cerf, 2000), a. 10, ad 8, pp. 111–13: “Set tamen, ut profundius intencionem Augustini scrutemur, et quomodo se habeat ueritas circa hoc, sciendum est quod quidam antiqui philosophi, non ponentes aliam uim cognoscitiuam preter sensum neque aliqua entia preter sensibilia, dixerunt quod nulla certitudo de ueritate a nobis haberi potest. Et hoc propter duo: primo quidem quia ponebant sensibilia semper esse in fluxu et nichil in rebus esse stabile; secundo, quia inueniuntur circa idem aliqui diuersimode iudicantes . . . hee sunt due rationes quas Augustinus tangit . . . Plato uero, discipulus eius, consentiens antiquis philosophis quod sensibilia semper sint in fluxu . . . posuit quidem ex una parte species rerum separatas a sensibilibus et immobiles . . . ex alia parte posuit in homine uirtutem cognoscitiuam supra sensum scilicet mentem uel intellectum, illustratum a quodam superiori sole intelligibili, sicut illustratur uisus a sole uisibili. Augustinus autem, Platonem secutus quantum fides catholica patiebatur, non posuit species rerum per se subsistentes, sed loco earum posuit rationes rerum in mente diuina, et quod per eas secundum intellectum illustratum a luce diuina de omnibus iudicamus, non quidem sic quod ipsas rationes uideamus—hoc enim esset impossibile nisi Dei essentiam uideremus –, set secundum quod ille supreme rationes imprimunt in mentes nostras: sic enim Plato posuit scientias de speciebus separatis esse, non quod ipse uiderentur set, secundum quod eas mens nostra participat, de rebus scientiam habet . . . Aristotiles autem per aliam uiam perrexit: primo enim multipliciter ostendit in sensibilibus esse aliquid stabile . . . tertio quod supra sensum est uirtus intellectiua, que iudicat de ueritate, non per aliqua intelligibilia extra existentia, set per lumen intellectus agentis, quod facit intelligibilia. Non multum autem refert dicere quod ipsa intelligibilia participentur a Deo uel quod lumen faciens intelligibilia.”

historical background to the passage from the *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus* cited in the objection. With Plato, Augustine sought to counter the ancient skeptics, who denied the possibility of truth. Plato proposed a way out of the instability of the material cosmos via separate forms or ideas and the mind's illumination by a higher source of knowledge. Augustine modified Plato by placing the ideas into the divine mind.

At first, it is not clear that Thomas explains what Augustine understood by "the impression of ideas." Aquinas immediately goes on to note that for Plato, the "scientific" knowledge of species occurs insofar as the mind participates in the ideas. He then turns to Aristotle, who offered "another way." Sensible beings are not so unstable after all. Thomas's unspoken premises are (1) that intrinsic forms are found in all material substances and (2) that the agent intellect has the capacity to abstract these forms. The mind's power is such that it needs no extrinsic elevating intellectual source on the natural plane, for the light of the individual agent intellect (along with the intelligible forms of material beings) suffices to enable certain knowledge about the world. In his conclusion, Thomas admits that Aristotle has little to say on the mind participating in divine light. But the corpus of the same article has already filled that lacuna by invoking the now-standard explanation centered on primary and secondary causality.

Thomas's treatment of Augustine is striking in many ways. He identifies the Latin Father as a thorough-going Platonist: "he followed Plato as much as the Catholic faith allowed him." The early Aquinas refers to Augustine's Platonism once in the commentary on the *Sentences* and once in the *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, but not in the context of noetic illumination.³⁰ Perhaps Thomas does explain Augustine's intention behind the notion of ideas being impressed in the mind after all. Aquinas immediately refers to Plato, probably because he holds Augustine's understanding of impressed ideas to be heavily Platonic. That is, the mind purified by intellectual training and moral virtue can attain an obscure access to the higher forms, the divine ideas that shine forth in the illumined memory. Certain knowledge occurs through a direct participation in divine light, even if noetic vision is not immediate but reserved to the saints in glory. In fact, Thomas's description of Plato is not far from the thought of the

³⁰ I follow the editor's notes on SC, a. 10, ad 8: Aquinas mentions Augustine's Platonism at *In II Sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 2c (in relation to the heavenly spheres) and at *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 21, a. 4, ad 3 (in relation to God's goodness). He discusses the Platonism of Augustine's epistemology in the late works, such as *Summa theologiae* [henceforth *ST*] (Ottawa: Commissio Piana, 1953), I, q. 84, a. 5c, to be analyzed below.

historical Augustine. The passage closely connects key issues that were central and intertwined for the historical Augustine: (1) the insufficiency of the material world to arrive at intellectual certitude; (2) the immediate interior presence of the divine ideas; and (3) exterior illumination.³¹ These themes are also central to Bonaventure's epistemology.³² Aquinas thus simultaneously answers both Augustine and the most formidable thirteenth-century promoter of his epistemology.

Aquinas's analysis in article 10 of the *De spiritualibus creaturis* alternates between Plato and Augustine for the sake of making three points. First, Thomas displays the historical contingency of Augustine's epistemology, who now speaks as a philosopher within one particular tradition, not as a Church Father who bears a special theological authority which exceeds that of most theologians (though it always falls well short of Scripture). Second, as he situates Augustine in the context of the ancient skeptics, Thomas explains to what extent he shares Augustine's convictions. Material objects alone do not enable us to grasp certain truth unless they are complemented by some type of intrinsic operational capacity or interior light on the part of the knowing subject. Aquinas does not completely oppose Augustine's epistemology, which is why he insists on pursuing the Latin Father's "deeper intention."³³ In order to overcome radical skepticism, Augustine posited the mind's direct contact with the divine intellect. For him, the divine ideas are the ultimate source of all knowledge. Aquinas's doctrine of God affirms the importance of the divine ideas, but he differs with Augustine about the human mode of participation in them. Yet for both thinkers some type of participation in the divine mind is the ultimate answer to philosophical skepticism.³⁴ Third, Aquinas clearly distinguishes his position from that of Augustine. Thomas has an Aristotelian epistemology crowned by a somewhat Proclan-Dionysian doctrine of divine causality. Partly following Aristotle, Thomas also pursues "another way." In other words, he no longer presents a fully harmonious synthesis of his own doctrine and Augustine's. Thus, in the corpus and in the answer to the first objection, where Thomas discusses the agent intellect as a participation in uncreated light, he does not identify his own

³¹ R. H. Nash, *The Light of the Mind*; idem, "Illumination, divine," in Fitzgerald and Cavadini, *Augustine Through the Ages*, 438–40; J. Rist, *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptized*, 75–89.

³² É. Wéber, *Dialogue et Dissensions*, 80–85.

³³ For *intentio auctoris* in Aquinas, see Mauricio Narváez, "Portée herméneutique de la notion d' 'intentio' chez Thomas d'Aquin," *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 99 (2001): 201–19, esp. 206–9.

³⁴ See Josef Pieper, *The Silence of St. Thomas* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957), 47–67.

teaching with Augustine's intention. Aquinas thus distances himself from his own commentary on the *Sentences* treatment of Augustinian illumination. He also simultaneously departs from Albert's approach in the *De homine*, where the latter identified Augustinian illumination with God's primary causality of the agent intellect's intrinsic operating capacity.³⁵

Aquinas also admits that there is a weakness in Aristotle's psychology, namely, the absence of a doctrine of participation. This conviction probably emerged from Thomas's contemporaneous commentary on Aristotle's *De anima* and from his realization that the Stagirite was not the author of the *Liber de causis*.³⁶ The late Aquinas no longer follows Albert's Proclan reading of the Stagirite as found in the *De homine*. Rather, he arrives at the realization that his own Aristotelianism is also a new philosophical creation, a creative fusion of the Stagirite with important elements of non-Aristotelian cosmology. Thomas's new historical awareness was also probably stimulated by his mid-1960s commentary on the Areopagite's *Divine*

³⁵ In the 1920s, Martin Grabmann pointed out that Thomas attained a consciousness of the distance between his own epistemology and Augustine's. Grabmann highlighted the importance of Thomas's comments on Augustine's Platonism in SC 10 and in ST I, q. 84, a. 5 (to be discussed below). To my knowledge, no one has followed up on his insight, nor has anyone shown the relation between Thomas's and Albert's approaches to Augustine. See Grabmann's *Der göttlicher und menschlicher Wahrheitserkenntnis nach Augustinus und Thomas von Aquin: Forschungen über die augustininische Illuminationstheorie und ihre Beurteilung durch den hl. Thomas von Aquin*, Veröffentlichungen des katholischen Institutes für Philosophie, Albertus Magnus Akademie zu Köln, 1.4 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1924), 70–71. For Themistius's commentary on Aristotle's *De anima* as another source for the notion of the agent intellect as participated light, see Jean-Baptiste Brenet, introduction to Thomas Aquinas, *Les créatures spirituelles*, ed. Jean-Baptiste Brenet, Sic et non (Paris: Vrin, 2010), 46.

³⁶ Several of Thomas's works from the 1250s refer to "the philosopher" (i.e., Aristotle) as the author of the *Liber de causis*, including *Quaestiones de quodlibet* IX, q. 3c; *Super Boetium de Trinitate*, pars 3, q. 6, a. 1, obj. 22. From the early 1260s on, Aquinas stops making this identification (e.g., *Summa contra Gentiles* I, ch. 26). For Aquinas's discovery of the Proclan roots of the *Liber de causis* in 1272, see Vincent A. Guagliardo, O.P., introduction to Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, trans. Vincent A. Guagliardo, O.P., Charles R. Hess, O.P. and Richard C. Taylor (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990), ix–xiii. Guagliardo notes that, in his *Liber de causis et de processu universitatis* composed between 1265 and 1272, Albert identified a certain "David the Jew" as the author of the *Liber de causis*, a medieval Spaniard who gathered and harmonized the teachings of Aristotle, Avicenna, Alfarabi, and Algazel. The German Dominican seems to have worked independently of William of Moerbeke's translation of Proclus's *Elements of Theology* and Aquinas's *Commentary on the Book of Causes*. Aquinas was probably unfamiliar with Albert's *Liber de causis et de processu universitatis*.

Names. In the preface of that commentary, Aquinas identifies the close link between Dionysius and Platonism.³⁷ The cosmology of Dionysius, heavily laden with the metaphysics of participation, provides a crucial doctrinal background for the epistemology of Thomas.

However, despite Albert's fusion of Aristotle and Proclus in the *De homine*, the German Dominican's subsequent Cologne lectures on Dionysius probably laid the doctrinal foundation for the late Thomas's critical stance toward the historical Augustine. On the banks of the Rhine, Albert taught Thomas three key philosophical/theological principles (among others): (1) the senses mediate all knowledge, especially, though not only, natural knowledge (prophetic visions are one exception); (2) the soul's ontological union with the body is the best means to attain perfect knowledge; and (3) there are well-defined limits to human knowledge in this life.³⁸ All three principles clash with Augustine's illumination. All three principles are related to the intertwined themes of the fixed cosmic hierarchy and the necessity of symbolic-liturgical mediations of divine light that dominate the works of Proclus and Dionysius.³⁹ All three principles, though interpreted somewhat differently, play a key doctrinal role in Albert's Dionysian commentaries, where the German Dominican quietly moves away from the Augustinian anthropology of his own commentary

³⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *In librum Beati Dionysii De divinis nominibus expositio*, ed. Ceslaus Pera, O.P. (Rome and Turin: Marietti, 1950), Proemium: ". . . plerumque utitur stilo et modo loquendi quo utebantur platonici. . . . Haec igitur Platoniorum ratio fidei non consonat nec veritati, quantum ad hoc quod continet de speciebus naturalibus separatim, sed quantum ad id quod dicebant de primo rerum Principio, verissima est eorum opinio et fidei christianae consona. Unde Dionysius Deum nominat quandoque ipsum quidem bonum aut superbonum aut principale bonum aut bonitatem omnis boni."

³⁸ For the sensible mediation of natural and supernatural knowledge of God in Aquinas, see *ST* I, q. 12, aa. 12–13; II–II, q. 180, a. 5, ad 2 (the last text invokes Dionysius). For mediated (reflective) self-knowledge, see *ST* I, q. 87, a. 1. For the soul-body union as being for the sake of the soul and human knowledge, see *ST* I, q. 76, a. 5, which references Dionysius. The limits of human knowledge especially emerge in Thomas's doctrine of divine knowledge and naming (*ST* I, qq. 12–13). See also É. Wéber, *Dialogue et Dissensions*, 148–65.

³⁹ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 2: *Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Style* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 154–61, 180; Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 162–64; William Riordan, *Divine Light: The Theology of Denys the Areopagite* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 80–90, 100–105; Paul Rorem, *Biblical and Liturgical Symbols within the Pseudo-Dionysian Synthesis* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1984), 56; R. Schenk, "From Providence to Grace," 314–17.

on the *Sentences*.⁴⁰ In both his early and late periods, Aquinas takes up the anthropological *doctrines* of the Cologne Albert. All three of Albert's principles just mentioned can already be found in Thomas's commentary on the *Sentences*. However, the *historical consciousness* of the distance between a more or less Dionysian–Aristotelian epistemology and an Augustinian path emerges in the late Aquinas, who deliberately synthesizes Aristotle with a non–Augustinian Platonic tradition. By 1272, Thomas's identification of Proclus as the true source of key doctrines in the *Liber de causis* would just about complete the historical picture (even if he never realized the real connection between the Areopagite and Proclus, though he recognized their doctrinal proximity). Dionysian (and Proclan) participation becomes one way to go beyond the metaphysical limits of the Stagirite, who has “little to say” on participation. By the mid-1260s, Thomas reads both Aristotle's and Augustine's epistemologies with noticeably greater historical nuance and accuracy than he did in his youth.

An irony emerges when we read Thomas's epistemology against the background of his German teacher. Albert often seems to have favored a hermeneutic of harmonization, a hermeneutic also operative in the *De homine*, as in the case of illumination. But in at least one text, the German Dominican employs a very different interpretive approach to the Bishop of Hippo, one that may have eventually inspired Aquinas's work as a critical historian of philosophy. In his 1250 commentary on the Areopagite's *Mystical Theology*, lectured in the presence of the young Thomas, Albert directly confronts the limits of Augustine's epistemology. The context involves the Dionysian language of knowing God by not-knowing or unknowing. An objection states that the most noble form of noetic vision is the opposite of not-knowing. Following Augustine, the objection notes that the object of the intellect's most noble vision is essentially present within the soul, especially the “object” that is God himself. Albert responds:

The saying of Augustine is false (*dictum Augustini habet calumniam*). For in order that something be known, it does not suffice that it be in the possible intellect, unless [intellect] is informed by its [the thing's] form. . . . Hence, the Philosopher says that the intellect understands itself as it understands other things.⁴¹

Scholastic theologians do not usually reject a statement by the great Latin Father as simply “false.” The strong language shows that the doctrine in

⁴⁰ I argue for this evolution in the early Albert's thought in my essay “How the Early Albertus Magnus Transformed Augustinian Interiority.”

⁴¹ Albertus Magnus, *Super Dionysii Mysticam theologiam*, ch. 2, p. 467.4–11: “Sciendum tamen, quod dictum Augustini habet calumniam; non enim sufficit aliquid

question is crucial for Albert. He makes explicit a doctrinal shift away from Augustine that occurs quietly in many other parts of his Dionysian commentaries. Albert firmly refuses Augustine's notion of knowledge by assimilation to an object's properties (via the simple presence of the noetic object) in favor of an epistemology centered on abstracted forms. Such noetic assimilation goes hand-in-hand with Augustinian illumination. In other words, the text implicitly points to a major tension, if not contradiction, between Augustinian epistemology (including illumination) and an Aristotelian epistemology of substantial form and abstraction. Albert's *Commentary on the Mystical Theology* synthesizes the latter noetics with Dionysian apophatism. At the very least, the German Dominican alerted Thomas to the possibility that on some key epistemological issues, an Aristotelian-Dionysian vision may at times be radically opposed to that of the great Latin Church Father: *dictum Augustini habet calumniam!* Thomas returned to his notes from Albert's Dionysian lectures in the mid-1260s, when he composed his own *De divinis nominibus*, the very time period in which Thomas began to approach Augustine's illumination in a new way. Oddly, in the medieval Dominican reception of Augustine's anthropology, Albert is almost certainly a source of the early Aquinas's hermeneutic of harmonization, yet perhaps also an inspiration for the late Aquinas's refusal of the same hermeneutic.

Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* on Illumination

Thomas's treatment of Augustinian illumination in the *Summa theologiae* is essentially in harmony with the contemporaneous treatment in article 10 of the *De spiritualibus creaturis*. I will briefly highlight a few doctrinal and historical elements that emerge in two passages in the *prima pars* of the *Summa theologiae*: question 84, article 5 and question 88, article 3.

In the first text, Thomas asks whether we know all things by their eternal reasons, that is, the divine ideas. A major interlocutor here is probably Bonaventure. The Franciscan had argued extensively that human beings need some type of direct contact with the eternal forms in God's mind in order for them to attain any certain knowledge.⁴² Aquinas's response is very similar to his treatment of the matter in the *De spiritualibus creaturis*, article 10. Yet there are noteworthy differences as well.

esse in intellectu possibili ad hoc quod cognoscatur, nisi informetur forma eius et sic fiat actu, sicut materia fit actu per formam agentis in ipsa et non per essentiam ipsius, etiam si in ea esset. Unde dicit Philosophus, quod intellectus intelligit se sicut et alia."

⁴² É. Wéber, *Dialogue et Dissensions*, 62–74. Throughout this work, Wéber shows that Aquinas engaged in an intense dialogue with Bonaventure and his anthropology.

On the surface, question 84, article 5 of the *prima pars* seems to appropriate Augustine's authority for Thomas's own position, an apparent return to the harmonizing hermeneutic of the commentary on the *Sentences*. For example, the second half of the corpus offers an exposition of Thomas's doctrine interspersed with citations of Augustine. But a closer look suggests that a different reading is closer to the author's intention. In the beginning of his response, Aquinas tells us that "whenever Augustine, who was imbued with the doctrines of the Platonists, found in their teaching anything consistent with the faith, he adopted it: and those things which he found contrary to the faith, he changed."⁴³ In other words, Augustine partially clung to Platonic doctrines that clashed with Christian belief by transforming them in such a way that the contradiction disappeared. This precision concerning Augustine's Platonism was missing in the *De spiritualibus creaturis*, article 10, ad 8. These comments precede the rest of the corpus where Aquinas develops at some length his own understanding of how we know things by the divine ideas. Since Thomas has completed dozens of articles on central epistemological questions in the preceding pages of the *prima pars*, his reader is by now certainly aware that Aquinas's approach is above all marked by Aristotle. In fact, Thomas has undertaken a kind of Aristotelian *ressourcement*, a Stagirite read not so much through the Platonizing Gloss of the Arabic commentators (a Gloss that Albert and numerous Parisian theologians further developed), but a Stagirite much more rooted in the primary sources.⁴⁴ Consequently, the introduction to question 84, article 5 of the *prima pars* probably signals that Aquinas may not always be in agreement with Augustine, who was "imbued with the doctrines of the Platonists." Thomas seems to give the reader a hermeneutical key for his subsequent citations of the Latin Father in the same article.

As in the *De spiritualibus creaturis*, Aquinas notes that Augustine modified Plato as he placed the separate forms or ideas into the divine mind. According to the Bishop of Hippo, "the soul knows everything in these eternal reasons." Thomas then stops citing or discussing the Latin Father until the end of the corpus. He introduces a twofold distinction for the phrase "knowing in" (eternal reasons):

⁴³ ST I, q. 84, a. 5c: "Et ideo Augustinus, qui doctrinis Platoniorum imbutus fuerat, si qua invenit fidei accommoda in eorum dictis, assumpsit; quae vero invenit fidei nostrae adversa, in melius commutavit."

⁴⁴ É. Gilson, *Pourquoi saint Thomas a critiqué saint Augustin*, 35–90, 113–27. For Thomas's Aristotelian *ressourcement*, see René-Antoine Gauthier, O.P., introduction to Anonymi Magistri Artium (c. 1245–50), *Lectura in librum de anima a quodam discipulo reportata*, Spicilegium Bonaventurianum 24 (Grottaferrata: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1985), 22.

In one way, [something is known in another] as in an object [that is] known; just as one may see in a mirror the images of things reflected therein. In this way, the soul in the present state of life cannot see all things in the eternal reasons; but the blessed who see God and all things in him thus know all things in the eternal reasons. In another way, one thing is said to be known in another just as in a principle of knowledge: thus we might say that we see in the sun the things which are seen through the sun. And thus one has to say that the human soul knows all things in the eternal reasons, by participation of which we know all things. For the intellectual light itself which is in us is nothing other than a participated similitude of the uncreated light, in which are contained the eternal reasons. Hence, in Psalm 4, it is said . . . "Lord, the light of your face is signed upon us."⁴⁵

The second way of "knowing in" refers to God's primary creative causality of the agent intellect's intrinsic operational capacity. Thomas clearly implies the doctrine already proposed in his commentary on the *Sentences*, the one rooted in Albert's reductionist reading of Augustinian illumination in the *De homine*. The connection between this teaching and the divine ideas is hardly evident. Indeed, Aquinas already begins to distance himself from the historical Augustine's epistemology. Thomas seems to realize this, for he does not invoke the Latin Father's authority for his twofold distinction, even though the second part of the distinction perfectly matches the commentary on the *Sentences* doctrine that the young Thomas attributed to Augustine's intention. Instead, he quotes Psalm 4, a favorite biblical verse on illumination.

Thomas presumes that he has adequately accounted for the role of the eternal reasons in human knowledge. He thus proceeds to show that participation in divine light as the principle of our cognitive operational capacities does not suffice for knowledge, for we also need intelligible

⁴⁵ ST I, q. 84, a. 5c: "Cum ergo quaeritur utrum anima humana in rationibus aeternis omnia cognoscat, dicendum est quod aliquid in aliquo dicitur cognosci dupliciter. Uno modo, sicut in obiecto cognito; sicut aliquis videt in speculo ea quorum imagines in speculo resultant. Et hoc modo anima in statu praesentis vitae non potest videre omnia in rationibus aeternis; sed sic in rationibus aeternis cognoscunt omnia beati, qui Deum vident et omnia in ipso. Alio modo dicitur aliquid cognosci in aliquo sicut in cognitionis principio; sicut si dicamus quod in sole videntur ea quae videntur per solem. Et sic necesse est dicere quod anima humana omnia cognoscat in rationibus aeternis, per quarum participationem omnia cognoscimus. Ipsum enim lumen intellectuale quod est in nobis, nihil est aliud quam quaedam participata similitudo luminis increati, in quo continentur rationes aeternae. Unde in Psalmo IV dicitur, 'Multi dicunt: Quis ostendit nobis bona?' cui quaestioni Psalmista respondet dicens: 'Signatum est super nos lumen vultus tui, Domine.'"

species. He attributes an epistemology by participation alone to “the Platonists.” Thomas corrects their philosophy with a citation of Augustine’s *De Trinitate*: the Platonists contradict their own position when they explain the different kinds and origins of animals in reference to sense experience. In other words, Augustine agrees that sense experience is indispensable to know the material world. Thomas immediately proceeds to answer an objection within the corpus. The implied objection runs as follows: did Augustine not posit a quasi-direct grasp of the eternal reasons as essential for reliable knowledge? Thomas responds with a citation of Augustine’s *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*. The Bishop of Hippo did not intend to teach that we see the eternal reasons themselves, for such a blessing is reserved to the saints in glory. Aquinas offered the same explanation in the *De spiritualibus creaturis*, article 10, ad 8.⁴⁶

We can read these closing passages of question 84, article 5 in at least two ways: either as (1) a return to a hermeneutic of harmonization, perhaps a typical scholastic approach to *intentio auctoris* that primarily pursues the truth of the matter rather than the historical intent of the author cited; or as (2) a carefully nuanced use of citations that remains silent on lingering points of disagreement. The second interpretation seems the more likely, though the article may be sufficiently ambiguous to preclude certainty about this conclusion. According to the second approach, Aquinas maintains that, for the Bishop of Hippo, *some type* of sense experience is essential, even though Aquinas seems to realize that he places greater weight on the value of sense experience than does Augustine. Second, Augustine agrees that our grasp of the divine ideas is not the same as in the beatific vision. Thomas says nothing about the type of vision of the eternal reasons that Augustine considered possible in this life. Aquinas’s discussion of participating God’s light earlier in the corpus

⁴⁶ ST I, q. 84, a. 5c: “Quia tamen praeter lumen intellectuale in nobis exiguntur species intelligibiles a rebus acceptae ad scientiam de rebus materialibus habendam; ideo non per solam participationem rationum aeternarum de rebus materialibus notitiam habemus, sicut Platonici posuerunt quod sola idearum participatio sufficit ad scientiam habendam. Unde Augustinus dicit, in *IV De Trin.*: ‘Numquid quia philosophi documentis certissimis persuadent aeternis rationibus omnia temporalia fieri, propterea potuerunt in ipsis rationibus perspicere, vel ex ipsis colligere quot sunt animalium genera, quae semina singulorum . . . ? Nonne ista omnia per locorum ac temporum historiam quaesierunt?’ Quod autem Augustinus non sic intellexerit omnia cognosci in rationibus aeternis, vel in incommutabili veritate, quasi ipsae rationes aeternae videantur, patet per hoc quod ipse dicit in libro *Octog. trium Quaest.* quod ‘rationalis anima non omnis et quaecumquae, sed quae sancta et pura fuerit, asseritur illi visioni’, scilicet rationum aeternarum, ‘esse idonea’; sicut sunt animae bonorum.”

never mentions the Latin Father. In fact, Thomas never explains Augustine's positive teaching behind the notion of knowing truth in the eternal reasons. All he mentions are the positions which the Bishop of Hippo excludes, that is, precisely where Thomas does agree with the historical Augustine. Both thinkers reject (1) the irrelevance of sense experience, and (2) the direct, unmediated vision of the divine ideas here below. Beyond that, we encounter silence on Augustine's teaching. Article 10, ad 8 of the *De spiritualibus creaturis* and the opening comments of the present *Summa theologiae* article concerning Augustine's Platonism both strongly suggest that this silence is calculated. The former text contrasts Plato's and Augustine's epistemologies to Aristotle's "other way." The first of the two interpretations mentioned above would imply a harmonization of Thomas's explicit reference to intelligible species and Augustine's affirmation of the need for sense experience, which would seem to clash with article 10 of the *De spiritualibus creaturis*. Thomas's intention behind our present *Summa theologiae* text seems to gain greater clarity when read in tandem with the parallel passage in the *De spiritualibus creaturis*.

A second text in the *prima pars* partly confirms my interpretation of Aquinas's approach to Augustinian noetics in the *Summa theologiae*. In question 88, article 3, Aquinas asks whether we know God or creatures first. The objections argue that God is the intellect's first object. According to the first objection, Augustine's teaching that we judge the truth of all things in light of the first truth seems to entail the consequence that God is first known. The third objection invokes Augustine's *imago Dei*, but seems less important for our purposes. The corpus offers a Dionysian-Aristotelian response that partly echoes Albert's commentaries on the Areopagite: God is known through creatures, and material beings are the intellect's proper object. In other words, we are made to know God indirectly, through the sensible world. God has created us to know in an embodied way, and thus to ascend to him through his effects.⁴⁷ The response to the first objection focuses on God as the first cause of knowledge, so that our capacity to make truth judgments is the result of an "impression of the first truth," referring back to question 84, article 5. Aquinas makes no explicit claims concerning Augustine's intention

⁴⁷ ST I, q. 88, a. 3c: "Respondeo dicendum quod cum intellectus humanus secundum statum praesentis vitae non possit intelligere substantias immateriales creatas, ut dictum est, multo minus potest intelligere essentiam substantiae increatae. Unde simpliciter dicendum est quod Deus non est primum quod a nobis cognoscitur; sed magis per creaturas in Dei cognitionem pervenimus, secundum illud Apostoli *Ad Rom. I*: 'Invisibilia Dei per ea quae facta sunt, intellecta, conspiciuntur.' Primum autem quod intelligitur a nobis secundum statum praesentis vitae, est

behind the latter's discussion of illumination. Instead, Thomas simply offers an explanation of his own teaching: we thus come back to primary and secondary causality.⁴⁸

One would claim too much in saying that the *prima pars* unequivocally manifests an Aquinas who approached *the whole* of Augustine's epistemology with a more or less clear awareness of its distance from Aristotle's anthropology. Some *prima pars* passages still seem to tend toward a harmonizing hermeneutic, or perhaps take up a standard medieval pursuit of the *intentio auctoris*, the truth sought both by the authority and by the medieval commentator, an approach which need not exclude a nuanced and critical reading of the authority being studied.⁴⁹ Yet in at least two texts, the late Thomas manifests an evident consciousness that at least some key elements of Augustine's noetics are heavily Platonic, and thus in tension with Aristotle and Aquinas's personal position.

Conclusion

The early Albert's anthropology is rich and complicated, evolving significantly from one work to the other. Consequently, Albert's disciples could develop radically different doctrinal lines. Thomas appropriated key insights on grace/nature and illumination from the *De homine*, as well as much of Albert's anthropology articulated in his Dionysian commentaries. Other disciples such as Dietrich von Freiberg appear to downplay Albert's Dionysianism. Dietrich and others seem to favor a much more Augustin-

quidditas rei materialis, quae est nostri intellectus obiectum, ut multoties supra dictum est."

⁴⁸ *ST I*, q. 88, a. 3, ad 1: "Ad primum ergo dicendum quod in luce primae veritatis omnia intelligimus et iudicamus, inquantum ipsum lumen intellectus nostri, sive naturale sive gratuitum, nihil aliud est quam quaedam impressio veritatis primae, ut supra dictum est [I, q. 12, a. 11, ad 3; q. 84, a. 5]. Unde cum ipsum lumen intellectus nostri non se habeat ad intellectum nostrum sicut quod intelligitur, sed sicut quo intelligitur; multo minus Deus est id quod primo a nostro intellectu intelligitur."

⁴⁹ E.g. *ST I*, q. 87, a. 1c: "Non ergo per essentiam suam, sed per actum suum se cognoscit intellectus noster. Et hoc dupliciter. Uno quidem modo, particulariter, secundum quod Socrates vel Plato percipit se habere animam intellectivam, ex hoc quod percipit se intelligere. Alio modo, in universali, secundum quod naturam humanae mentis ex actu intellectus consideramus. Sed verum est quod iudicium et efficacia huius cognitionis per quam naturam animae cognoscimus, competit nobis secundum derivationem luminis intellectus nostri a veritate divina, in qua rationes omnium rerum continentur, sicut supra dictum est. Unde Augustinus dicit in *IX De Trin.*: 'Intuemur inviolabilem veritatem, ex qua perfecte, quantum possumus, definimus non qualis sit uniuscuiusque hominis mens, sed qualis esse sempiternis rationibus debeat.'"

ian and Arabic philosophical anthropology. They also integrate original developments in the late Albert's understanding of the agent intellect.⁵⁰

The criteria for membership in the "Albert school" need to be highly nuanced for at least two reasons. First, Albert's thought is quite fluid from one work to the next. Second, he looks to integrate multiple philosophical and theological traditions whenever possible, which helps to create unresolved doctrinal tensions within Albert's works. Since Aquinas continued and refined Albert's transformation of Augustinian illumination, it would seem to make little sense to set up a stark contrast between their anthropologies. Such an opposition also cannot account for the fact that Albert and Thomas shared other important doctrines, from the Aristotelian-Dionysian mediation of knowledge to the grace/nature distinction.⁵¹

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⁵⁰ See Kurt Flasch, *Dietrich von Freiberg: Philosophie, Theologie Naturforschung um 1300* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 2007), 215–37, 408.

⁵¹ In her study *Divine Illumination: The History and Future of Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), Lydia Schumacher argues that Aquinas was the greatest thirteenth-century champion of Augustine's epistemology (179). She holds that Thomas faithfully translated that epistemology into the language and concepts of the High Middle Ages. I find her reading of Augustine and Aquinas problematic for several reasons. First, she offers a revisionist interpretation of illumination in Augustine that presumes little evolution in his thought. This presupposition largely rests on one recent study (by Carol Harrison) (25–29). Schumacher takes a minority position in Augustinian studies, yet she never directly confronts the scholarly literature that promotes the standard reading of Augustine's noetics. Second, she ignores the influence of Proclan and Dionysian light metaphysics and primary/secondary causality on Thomas's anthropology. Third, her understanding of the grace/nature distinction in Aquinas is largely shaped by her polemics against Neo-Thomism, so that Thomas's own grace/nature distinction and its tight relation with the theory of illumination hardly emerges in her work (156–57, 163–65, 176–79). Fourth, she says nothing on Aquinas's comments concerning Augustine's Platonism. Fifth, she spends little time on the details of Aquinas's key texts that discuss the mind's illumination. She never even mentions the passages from the commentary on the *Sentences* and the *De spiritualibus creaturis*. Sixth, she denies Aquinas's reductive reading of Augustine on memory. As previously noted, memory is the site of illumination for the Latin Father. Schumacher cites Gilles Emery's important monograph, *The Trinitarian Theology of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Francesca Aran Murphy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), to argue that Thomas's doctrine of God is consistent with Augustine's (154). But she cannot explain why Emery says next to nothing about memory in his exposition of Thomas's theology of God the Father and of the *imago Dei*. Elsewhere, I have pointed to the Albertian roots of Thomas's reductive approach to Augustinian memory ("How the Early Albertus Magnus Transformed Augustinian Interiority," 355–62).