Plato and St. Thomas Aquinas on the *One*/God

Seeing St. Thomas Aquinas' Christian Theology in the Light of Platonism and Neoplatonism

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Abstract: The article begins with an inquiry on St. Thomas Aquinas' theological framework of God in the *Summa Theologica*, as seen through the lenses of Pseudo-Dionysius and Proclus Lycaeus, in the Light of Plato's dialectical exploration of the *One* in the *Parmenides*. We proceed to the similarities and differences between St. Thomas Aquinas' theology and Plato's philosophy in terms of the means through which the soul ascends towards the highest vision. Ideas of thinkers such as Democritus, Aristotle, Iamblichus, Thomas Taylor, Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger supported or provided counter arguments regarding these matters. The essay raises a significant question pertaining to the relationship between Plato's thought with that of St. Thomas Aquinas'.

Key terms: The *One*, God, *Being*, *essence* (*οὐσία*), *Logos*, faith, Plato, Aquinas

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Introduction

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle attempts to utilize a physical theology as a form of ascent to contemplative philosophy. He also states that this study is to be chosen over all other sciences; and it is this "first science of theology"[1] that we must prefer to all other kinds of contemplation, the study of the divine. Through the 2nd century C.E. and onward, the development of Christian theology was partly inspired by interpretations of Neoplatonism, a term coined by early 19th century European scholarship to signify a period of time after Plato that began with the successors of Plato's Academy, including Aristotle and later Plotinus and Proclus. This essay will focus on the Christian view of God through the lenses of the *Prima Pars*, of the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas, contrasted with Plato's view of the *One* in *Parmenides*, with its further elucidation by the *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, written during the 5th century C.E. by Proclus.[2]

For the Platonic tradition, the *One* is not only superior to *Soul* and *Intellect*, but It is even beyond *Being* itself, truly ineffable; the same way the Christian God is above all assertions and negations, and that through which all divine *beings* and faculties exist.[3] From the entirety of the Platonic corpus, the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides* have been considered the substance of Plato's thought, the former being on a mystical cosmology and the latter on metaphysical theology.[4] The *Parmenides* contains nine hypotheses. The first hypothesis treats the dialectical exploration of how there is no name, discourse, science, opinion, or knowledge of the *One*, while the second hypothesis takes the predicates intelligibly negated in the first, and asserts them of the *One* coordinate with *Being*.[5] The distinction between **I. what can be said of the *One*/God beyond *Being*** and **II. what can be said of the *One*/God coordinate with *Being*** plays a major role in understanding systematic theology and will be explored in the second part of the argument. Since the hypotheses treat an extended range of metaphysical attributes, this paper will only go through the dialectics of two terms, whose development is expounded in Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*. Subsequently, these will be further contrasted with Thomas Aquinas' theological framework of God in the *Summa Theologica*.

In Roman Catholicism, it is the sum of all known learning and doctrine, of all that can be known about God and the relationship between God and humanity.[6] Aristotle's works had a profound impact on St. Thomas' thought. This is evident in the five ways to prove God's existence from the effects caused in the visible world and other passages of this nature.[7] In the *Summa Theologica*, he studies and creates a structure for the *Sacred Doctrine*, which is a science that "proceeds from principles established by the light of a higher science, namely, the science of God and the blessed".[8] Alongside with the Aristotelian influence, Pseudo-Dionysius is a figure whose writings are quoted over 1700 times in the *Summa Theologica* and constitute a substantial part on which St. Thomas' system relies.[9] Pseudo-Dionysius' works emerged in Europe at the end of the 5th century C.E. and have had a significant impact on Western thought. His identity,

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[1] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books, 2004), VI, 1026a.
[2] Proclus, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), Introduction, p. 13, 37.
[3] Ibid., 1040ff.; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (California: Coyote Canyon Press, 2018), I, Q. 3, A. 2, p. 32.
[4] Proclus, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), Introduction p. 12.
[5] Ibid., VI, 1040ff.
[6] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (California: Coyote Canyon Press, 2018), I, Q. 1, A.1, p. 27.
[7] Ibid., I, Q. 2, Art. 3, p. 31.
[8] Ibid., I, Q. 1, Art. 2, p. 27.
[9] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Pseudo-Dionysius Complete Works*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), p. 21.

on the other hand, is a matter of extensive discussion since a scholarly consensus still needs to be reached to about this matter. Dionysius the Areopagite is said to have been converted by Saint Paul, the Apostle, and present at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. However, at the end of the 15th century, the Florentine humanist Lorenzo Valla proved that the identity of the thinker behind the corpus of writings of Dionysius the Areopagite does not match with the saint that witnessed Christ's crucifixion, thus, receiving the prefix of "pseudo"[10].

What the following comparative essay will attempt is to render intelligible the profound implications of Plato's *Parmenides* and how traces of its meaning are secretly woven in the very core of the *Sacred Doctrine*.

I. What can be said of the *One*/God beyond *Being*?

General introduction to the Negations

This section of the study will focus on the relationship between the *One* in the first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides*, as further articulated by Proclus, and Thomas Aquinas' view of God in the highest sense. Proclus defines a "hypothesis" as "that which takes part of the procedure and produces similar conclusions, either all affirmative or all negative or both."[11]

The first hypothesis in Plato's *Parmenides* dialectically explores the *One* as superior to *Being* and to all other things, by intelligibly negating all predicates that could in turn be said of the *One* coordinate with *Being*. While affirmations are considered positive in the world of empirical sciences, the negations present in the *Parmenides* are higher and beyond the former, since they are most fit to describe what is transcendent all knowledge and perception. For Plato denies that the *One* is or is not but even negation itself.[12] Plato's hypothesis reaches the truly ineffable. Pseudo-Dionysius interprets this to mean that Plato by begins from the hypothetical and ends in that which is unhypothetical and, as stated earlier, ineffable.[13] In this following section the discussion will refrain from affirmatively attributing any physical predicates of God and will deal only with denials of all sorts of categories of *beings*, whether they may be intellectual or corporeal.

The Cloud of Unknowing

St. Thomas Aquinas says in the *Summa Theologica*: "He is supremely undivided inasmuch as *He* is divided, neither actually nor potentially, by any mode of division; since *He* is altogether simple."[14] This kind of language strongly reverberates Aristotelian terminology, later further discussed in this text. Similarly, Plato affirms: "If there is a *One*, of course the *One* will not be many."[15] When referring to God, St. Thomas utilizes *He* while in Attic Greek, the terminology of *αὐτός* frequently denotes in Plato a relation with excellence in the divine. From these two passages follows that that which is beyond all things must be a pure *One*, possessing no parts and being fully undivided. It would be relevant to question whether the *One* and God are the same, similar or different in the view of these thinkers. Since it has been shown that both

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[10] Ibid., p. 34.
[11] Proclus, VI, 1052ff., In the same passage Proclus further clarifies this definition: "It makes no difference to them whether we draw these conclusions in relation to itself or to something else, but only that the *quality* of the proposition is the same".
[12] Plato, *Parmenides*, trans. F. M. Cornford (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973), 142b.
[13] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 1025B.
[14] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (California: Coyote Canyon Press, 2018), I, Q. 11, Art. 4, p. 46.
[15] Plato, *Parmenides*, trans. F. M. Cornford (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973), 137c.

Plato and St. Thomas explore a supreme oneness of the *One*/God, the discussion ought to move on to what follows from the latter's assertion, that God is supremely *One*, by using an abbreviated form of a Platonic inspired method through the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* when discussing the ineffable *One*.

If God is one, *He* cannot be many. *He* cannot be a whole, for a whole is made of parts. *He* cannot have a beginning, middle, end, or shape. God is not anywhere, being neither in *Himself* nor in another. If *He* were in *Himself*, *He* would be both container and contained, while being *One*. If *He* were in another, *He* would be encompassed by that in which it is contained, and that is impossible if God is supremely *One*. If *He* were in motion, *He* would be moving either in place or undergoing alteration. If the former was true, then God would have a center around which its parts would be moving, while if the latter was true, then *He* would change into something other than *Himself*. Since God, as previously shown, cannot be in the same place, it follows that *He* can be neither at rest nor in motion. Consequently, God is not the same as *Himself* nor is *He* the same as another for sameness is different from God and in predicating sameness of God, *He* would become both, *One* and not *One*. In the latter case, *He* would become different from *Himself*. If *He* would be other than *Himself* or other than another that would imply multiplicity, which was previously stated. Consequently, God can be neither like nor unlike *Himself*. The same applies to God being like or unlike another. Furthermore, God cannot be either equal or unequal to *Himself* or to another, since being equal means having the same measures as anything to which one may be equal. Since God does not have likeness, equality, or sameness, *He* cannot be younger, older, or of the same age as *Himself* or as another. And thus, God cannot participate in time by any means. If God does not participate in time, *He* never *was*, nor can one say *He has become* or *is becoming* or *is*, or that *He will be* in the future. Since all *beings* participate in time, it can only follow that God, spoken of in the highest sense, cannot be coordinate with *Being*, given that, the conclusions are true. Ultimately, it follows that God is neither the *One* nor *One* nor that *He is* or *is not* in any way like the *One*.[16]

We have examined the character of the Platonic *One* and the Christian God, in the sense of being purely one and different, therefore we will now strictly explore the Thomistic theological framework of God. In the *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas says: "Now, because we cannot know what God is, but rather what *He* is not, we have no means for considering how God is, but rather how *He* is not".[17] Here, God is denied *Being* in a transcendental way. When using the word "is", St. Thomas refers to the knowledge of God, which is unattainable through any sort of affirmative reasoning process. Elsewhere, he says there is no name that can be attributed to God, not even the name "God". According to St. Thomas, a name is communicable either by similitude or properly. By similitude, a name is attributed to things that are part of the signification of the name in question such as "biped" and "rational", which participate in the nature of humankind. The latter sense is used when giving one name to many belonging to the same species; the same way the word "humankind" is predicated of all *beings* which are of this same nature, and thus, names are never given particularly but universally. St. Thomas finds neither of these ways suitable for the cause of all *beings*. He reaches the conclusion that the name "God" is communicable only by means of opinion, and not in reality, given the ontological distinction between the two.[18] This conclusion is worth noted for the means of communicating "God" by 'opinion' unlike reality. Yet, "God" is beyond *Being*, as constituting its source and no name or opinion can be attributed to *Him* who is the source of all things. Moreover, St. Thomas Aquinas utilizes a negative dialectic to reach God, as influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius: "For this would be really to see and to know: to praise the Transcendent *One* in a transcending way,

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[16] All negations are displayed in the same order Plato explored them; Plato, *Parmenides*, trans. F. M. Cornford (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973), 137c - 142a.

[17] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (California: Coyote Canyon Press, 2018), I, Q. 3 Art. 1, p. 31.

[18] Ibid., I, Q.13, Art. 9, p. 55.

namely through the denial of all beings."[19]

The next question will explore what the purpose of the negations is and the role they play in the attaining of the fullest and highest vision the created intellect has the capacity for. In order to answer the proposed inquiry, in discussing the cloud of unknowing, Pseudo-Dionysius says: "Here, renouncing all that the mind may conceive, wrapped entirely in the intangible and the invisible, he belongs completely to him who is beyond everything. Here being neither oneself nor someone else, one is supremely united to the completely unknown by an inactivity of all knowledge and knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing."[20] According to the ineffable nature of God, the mind may leave all knowing and unknowing in order to attain the highest vision capable for humankind. This divine ascent is actualized through the purification of the images one may have of God. This is a hierarchical ascent from the lowest and closest to the visible realm, such as shapes and magnitudes, to the divine realm such as to Spirit, and the Good. Also, since God is present in all things by means of power, presence, and *essence*,[21] these images exist everywhere, as taking both corporeal and incorporeal forms. As approaching this most beautiful vision of *Him*, the images or predicates one may have of God ought to diminish in number until reaching that divine darkness where *He* dwells; concealed from all the light among *beings*. Similarly, St. Thomas accepts this view: "God is called incomprehensible not because anything of *Him* is not seen; but because *He* is not seen as perfectly as *He* is capable of being seen; thus when any demonstrable proposition is known by probable reason only, it does not follow that any part of it is unknown, either the subject, or the predicate, or the composition; but that it is not as perfectly known as it is capable of being known."[22] To him, one may also have such a vision as the one described by Pseudo-Dionysius, since it is remote from all demonstrable propositions, reason and does not constitute knowledge of God, but only the highest vision of *Him* accessible to humankind. This does not refute, by any means, the incomprehensibility of God. For this vision cannot be denominated as knowledge, for the reasons mentioned above. The experience described by Pseudo-Dionysius is reminiscent of Proclus and can be seen in the *Parmenides* through the series of negations, including of all images, thus ascending from *Being* to the inexpressible *itself*.[23]

Having shown the interchangeable character of the *One* and God, as understood in the highest sense and having proved the similarities in terms of the means to both, attaining and defining the highest vision of God/*One*, it can only follow that the goal of the first hypothesis as understood through the lens of Pseudo-Dionysius had profound effects on the development of St. Thomas Aquinas' theological system.

Pseudo-Dionysius' reach is concisely summarized by Ronald F. Hathaway: "It is sufficient to name John of Damascus, John Scotus Eriugena, Richard and Hugh of St. Victor, Thomas Aquinas, Nicolas of Cusa, Eckhart, Robert Grosseteste, Dante, and Marsilio Ficino to sense the breadth of his [Pseudo-Dionysius] direct influence on medieval thought."[24] Hathaway goes further in stating that Pseudo-Dionysius' "hierarchic theory has ramifications pertinent not only to modern and medieval ecclesiastical history and theology, but also to the history of philosophy as a whole."[25]

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[19] Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 1025B.
[20] Ibid., 1001A.
[21] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (California: Coyote Canyon Press, 2018), I, Q. 8, Art. 1, p. 41.
[22] Ibid., I, Q. 12, Art. 7, p. 49.
[23] Proclus, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), VII, 76K.
[24] Ronald F. Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order in the Letters of Pseudo-Dionysius* (Massachusetts: Brandeis University, 1969), I, p. 8.
[25] Ibid., I, p. 9.

II. What can be said of the *One*/God coordinate with *Being*?

The Distinction

This next section will explore the relationship between the second hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides,* and St. Thomas Aquinas' view of God as coordinate with *Being*, which is second in rank from the ineffable Good. To accomplish this goal, the following discussion will expound the most distinctive universal properties and functions St. Thomas assigns to God taken in the former sense. These will be followed by a comparative inquiry of the limited and the unlimited character of God, as illustrated by both Plato and St. Thomas, who, as stated previously, understands Plato through the lens of Pseudo-Dionysius.

Before diving into this inquiry, the distinction between the *One*/God beyond *Being* and the *One*/God coordinate with *Being* must be clarified. In his *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, Proclus brings forth this same issue by saying: "For he (Plato) knows that *One* has two meanings-- in one sense it transcends, in the other it is coordinate with, *is*. In the latter sense, it is in a way comparable to existence as participating and being participated in by it. But in the former, it is incomparable and imparticipable by everything."[26] Since the *One* which *is*, means that it is coordinate with *Being*, is in a way comparable to existence, predicates such as magnitude, shape, limit, time, motion, rest and all the other attributes -negated in the first section- can now be both asserted and negated of *He* who *is*, in such a way, that affirmative conclusions can be reached about that through which all *beings* exist. This is the subject matter which serves as the conceptual framework of this section and is expounded in the second hypothesis. Comparably, St. Thomas makes a similar distinction in the following passage: "This name *HE WHO IS* is the name of God more properly than this name 'God,' as regards its source, namely, existence; and as regards the mode of signification and consignification, as said above."[27] Consequently, he differentiates the name "God" as incommunicable from its lower counterpart bound with *Being*; which is a more proper appellation inasmuch as all things exist through "*He who is*". This can also be understood as the signification of the latter denomination in the Thomistic sense. Furthermore, the consignification of the name "*He who is*" simply refers to its universality, namely the boundless nature of all things participating in God's *essence*. And thus, this finding will allow the possibility of positively inquiring about the "Source and end of all things."[28]

The Thomistic Theological Framework of God

The topic by itself has been, and still is, a matter of extensive scholarly discussion, thus the following paragraph will serve as an extensive list of the most distinct universal divine names and functions St. Thomas uses when discussing "*He who is*"; apart from the transcendent Godhead. This is going to serve as the foundation of the following inquiry of the *Unlimited* and *Limited* as seen in the *One* which *is*.

St. Thomas describes God as the first mover, immovable, eternal, needing to be, existing always, immutable, as having no beginning, no end, existing simultaneously, simple, not a composite, free from all contrariety, being his own *essence*,[29] pure act,

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[26] Proclus, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), VII, 34ff.

[27] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (California: Coyote Canyon Press, 2018), I, Q. 13, Art. 11, p. 56.

[28] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 825B.

[29] *Essence* (*οὐσία*) is defined by Aristotle (*Metaphysics*; Zeta 1035b) as the *form* of a composite, as soul is to humankind. *Essence* in Aristotle has the property of *kinesis* similar to how the soul is said to operate, being as it is, that towards which it moves, its own final cause. (*κίνησῖς* = locomotion, alteration, decay, growth) (Aristotle; *De Anima* I.3 406a). All of the powers of the soul are said to be *movements* in this

one, infinite quantity, power, as embracing all beings, and as supreme perfection. He continues by asserting that all perfection found in things preexists in *Him* abundantly and that all perfections are one in God. Additionally, being, power, action, and other similar attributes pertain to perfection and are identical with *His essence*. There is neither definition of nor *form* and *matter* in *Him*, thus being the cause of all intellectuality. Neither succession nor discursive reasoning are in God's understanding. What *He* understands and that which is understood is identical with *His essence*, and everything is comprehended in *His* intellect by a single act of intuition. God loves everything by a single act of *His* Will and does not presuppose matter in *His* activity. *He* brought all things into existence, and nothing is coeternal with *Him*. *He* is the first truth from which all other truths have their certitude, moves things in a way that is consonant with their nature, helps humankind by an increase of light, communicates existence to all things just as the sun emanates light, is the cause of the continuation of existence in things, is in all things by *essence*, power and presence, and arranges and orders through the means of intermediate causes.[30]

The Limited/Unlimited

The following discussion will explore this pair of opposites as present in the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides* by using Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* as the foundation for all the explanation that is to follow. This investigation aims at showing the implications of the dialectical exploration of the *One* as seen in the Platonic text, later brought to a close relation with St. Thomas' conceptual framework of God, through as many Thomistic attributes of God as possible.[31]

In the *Parmenides*, one of the conclusions reached in the first hypothesis is that "the end and the beginning are the limits of each thing."[32] Therefore, "the *One* is unlimited, if it has neither beginning nor end." [33] Regarding this issue Proclus discerns that in the second hypothesis, and in the interests of establishing the triad of beginning, middle, and end, Plato brings the *Limited* and the *Unlimited* in relationship to the *One*. In this sense, it is said to be resting where it *is*, proceeding forth and returning to itself while holding together its "peak of superiority" (*κατ'ἄκραν υπερβολήν).*[34] A more recent translation by Juan F. Balboa presents this notion as "Its Summit of Hyperbolic-Excellence". The translator explains that he sees this notion analogical to a phrase in Plato's *Republic*, Book VI, where Glaucon exclaims in a jovial way: "Daemonic Apollo of Hyperbolic Heights!", to which Socrates remarks that the ideas are not only mentally-recognized by the Good, but by their existence and *ousia* also derived from that Source, whereas *ousia* is not an attribute of the Good, since the Good transcends beyond *ousia* both in dignity/rank and in power. Hence, Juan F. Balboa further clarifies that when Proclus wrote about 'Its Summit of Hyperbolic Excellence' he may have had this phrase of Glaucon's in mind, for on the one hand, the Hyperbolic-Heights that Glaucon saw is the Transcendent-Beyond that Socrates referred to, while on the other hand, the Summit or the Hyparxis, is always the most excellent perfection possible, in this case the *One*/Good. *Ousia* (*οὐσίᾱ*) in Plato, is a turning about itself, unlike

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sense. Additionally, *essence*, as attributed to God by St. Thomas, is superior to all other *essences*, to such an extent that all the other *essences* emerge from *Him* and return to *Him*.

[30] All the attributes come from the *Summa of the Summa Theologica*. The page numbers according to each of the predicates mentioned in the order in which they were illustrated goes as follows (two or more attributes may appear on the same page): 9, 10, 11 (two), 12 (three), 13, 14 (two), 15 (two), 16, 18, 21, 22 (two), 23 (two), 24, 25, 27, 29, 30, 31, 51 (two), 64, 100, 107, 145 (two), 143, 146 (two), 152, 167.

[31] Both the structure and the interpretations explored in the following discussion illustrate an abbreviated form of Proclus' exploration of the *Limited* and the *Unlimited* in Book VI of his *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, 1116 - 1124.

[32] Plato, *Parmenides*, trans. F. M. Cornford (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973), 137d.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Proclus, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), VI, 1116ff.

Aristotle's explicit notion, and can also be seen as the *One*'s intellection, existence, and generative properties. This notion is also partially grasped in St. Thomas Aquinas' proposition in that there is neither discursive reasoning, nor multiplicity in God and that the mind of God is identical with *His essence* (also the common translation of "*οὐσίᾱ*").

Proclus continues the inquiry about the *Limited* and the *Unlimited* with the different ways in which unlimitedness applies to the *One* coordinate with *Being*. Namely, it is unlimited in this way, that it is incomprehensible and unencompassable while also being the limit of everything that has existence without imposing any limit on itself. Another understanding of the *One*'s unlimitedness is infinite power, along with the causal interpretation of this attribute, for all things are generated by it, and that all the unlimitedness immanent in the visible world is caused by the *One* which *is*. Furthermore, the *Unlimited* may be spoken of as Eternity itself which is most appropriately accordant with the *One*/God, as denoting both its comprehension and causation of the whole infinity of the intelligible realm. Additionally, it is called the "fountain of all infinity (*τήν πρωτιστην πηγήν αυτήν*) — intelligible, intellectual, psychic (pertaining to the soul), corporeal, or material." [35] The *One* also arranges and orders all things through intermediate causes, as the secondary classes of *beings* depend on the ones prior to them, for "the mean is to the first term as the last term is to the mean".[36] This describes the analogy: *noesis* is to d*ianoia* as *pistis* is to *eikasia*. Ultimately, material generation is held together through eternal generation which participates in the *Unlimited*.

The discussion will now turn to examine the "chain of Limit" (*τήν σειρᾶν τοῦ πέρατος*).[37] The primary way in which this is predicated of the *One* is as the "fount and foundation of all limits, intelligible, intellectual, supracosmic, encosmic, preexistent itself as the measure and bound of all things."[38] The second limit attributed to it is *Eternity*, since it is both limited and unlimited by virtue of being the "measure of all intellectual activity and the bound of the life of the intellect."[39] The *One* is also static, immovable and immutable by virtue of remaining in and turning upon itself, thus bounded and limited, being the first principle of all motion.[40] Since it becomes neither more nor less than itself, it has been said to be limited, along with causing Time which is both the measure and the limit of all things. The *form* in *matter* can be seen also as caused by limit, since humankind is confined to the characteristics and properties belonging to its species. The *One* which *is*, is also pure actuality in the sense that it is the object of desire of all things. These, in turn, have existence and power in accordance with their respective nature, denoting limit.

In his work, *Archetypal Psychology, Dreamwork, and Neoplatonism*, Gregory Shaw inquiries into the relationship of the *Limited* and *Unlimited* in respect to the soul's ascent towards the *One*. For, in discussing Iamblichus, he states: "Mediating opposites was the soul's only way to enter the hidden activity of the *One* which, according to Iamblichus, was an entirely ineffable principle 'known' only through the mixing of its equally unknowable derivatives: the Limit and the Unlimited, from which all number and existence derive."[41] Thus, it is through the mediation of opposites such as sameness/difference, rest/motion, limited/unlimited that the soul trains its vision to the *One*. The exploration of divinity by means of opposites is a method that seems to be employed upon by both Plato and Aristotle and it is empiricism that separates the latter

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[35] Ibid., VI, 1120ff.
[36] Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973), 32a.
[37] Proclus, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), VI, 1121ff.
[38] Ibid., VI, 1121ff.
[39] Ibid., VI, 1122ff.
[40] Ibid., VI, 1122ff.
[41] Gregory Shaw, *Archetypal Psychology, Dreamwork, and Neoplatonism* (Massachusetts: Stonehill College, 2016), I, p. 332.

from the former in expressing this spiritual exercise. According to Iamblichus, however, in animating the body, the soul shares in mortality and its *essence* (*οὐσία)* becomes fragmented into *essences* (*οὐσίαι*), and thus its *ousia* is both "one and many"[42]. And it is through the contemplation of opposites, reflecting upon the soul's nature as intermediate between the immortality of gods and the mortality of generated *beings*, that it becomes a *container* for receiving the gods. Plato reiterates this same idea in the *Timaeus*, at 34c-35a, where he expounds on the nature of the soul: "From the being which is indivisible and unchangeable, and from that kind of being which is distributed among bodies, he compounded a third and intermediate kind of being."[43] Alan Cardew finds traces of these doctrines manifest within the development of modern psychology, as seen in the case of Carl Jung, for the former says that "In his last great work, *Mysterium Coniunctionis: An Inquiry into the Separation and Synthesis of Psychic Opposites in Alchemy* (1955–1956), Jung returns to an enquiry into the opposition of elements in the psyche which he had first examined in 1921 in *Psychological Types*."[44]

The current inquiry has now explored the various classes of both the *Limited* and the *Unlimited*, and the specific character and function that each of the two possesses in relation to the *One* which *is* and to the soul's means to ascent. This has also been seen in Iamblichus' thought traced back to Plato and its extension and relevance in modern psychology. Lastly, for the purpose of this paper, we note the significant impact of Plato's *Parmenides*, further elucidated by Proclus' thought then converted by Pseudo-Dionysius' and later its influence on St. Thomas Aquinas' theological framework and his assertions of "God".

Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas

Alongside the *Corpus Areopagiticum* and the Bible, Aristotle and his translations constitute other relevant pillars upon which St. Thomas Aquinas' theology relies. In addition to the five ways to prove God's existence, two ideas that are predominant throughout the Aristotelian corpus of writings also play a crucial role in the development of St. Thomas' theology as seen in passages such as: "Now every being is either simple or compound. But what is simple is undivided, both actually and potentially. Whereas what is compound, has not being whilst its parts are divided, but after they make up and compose it."[45] The ideas of potentiality and actuality seem to be derived from natural processes such as the life cycle of a plant developing from a mere seed into a living organism. In other words, the seed contains within itself all that it requires in order to grow from a state of potentiality to one of actuality. In part, this empirical method developed by Aristotle appears to have emerged from his displayed understanding of both the Presocratics and Plato. In order to accomplish this goal, we will proceed with a contrast between Democritus' thought and Aristotle's understanding of it, which will then be related to the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Democritus states that truth that we meet "perceptually is nothing reliable"[46], "by convention there is sweet, bitter, hot and cold"[47], "opinions flow"[48] and there is "no lightning-flash hurled by Zeus that does not contain pure light from the aether."[49] In essence, these passages embody what would later become Platonic thought. For the insufficiency of the irrational faculties of the soul, in respect to the pursuit of

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[42]Ibid.
[43] Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973), 34c-35a.
[44] Alan Cardew, *Antiquity and Anxiety* (England, University of Essex), p. 70.
[45] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (California: Coyote Canyon Press, 2018), I, Q. 11, Art. 1, p. 45.
[46] Philip Wheelwright, *The Presocratics*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960), VI, p. 182-186.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.

knowledge of the divine is impartible from Platonic thought. Conversely, Aristotle makes numerous points about the opposite stand, claiming that Democritus posits that "whatever appears to the senses must be true"[50]. Other passages solidify Aristotle's stand in regards to Democritus: "Democritus thus explains why life and death are bound up with respiration"[51] and what Democritus "says is that the soul and the hot are identical"[52]. Aristotle thus employs science and rigorous empirical demonstrations as the foundation of his thought, which can develop abilities to, eventually, ascend to Platonic thought. On the basis of this kind of understanding, the Stagirite weaves a system of opinions regarding both Democritus and the other Presocratics, which appears to deviate from the original doctrines expounded by the latter. In this regard, however, there is a great deal of uncertainty, for very few fragments from Democritus survived until modern times. Thus, Aristotle approaches theology physically, and as inseparable from nature and its afferent processes[53] which resonates with St. Thomas Aquinas' own development of theology, as seen in the following section of this inquiry.

St. Thomas Aquinas' theology reflects the ideas of ascent from appearances, motion and mutation, to an immovable, immutable, and indivisible cause. He espouses, as influenced by the aforementioned predecessors, that every thing which is moved, is moved by something, and that the first mover must, out of necessity, be immovable and pure actuality.[54] Aristotle states: "Our principle, the primary being, is unmovable both intrinsically and accidentally and yet is the source of the primary movement, which is eternal and single".[55] As shown above, St. Thomas utilized the theology developed by Aristotle for the purpose of ascending to the Platonic dialectic, yet, he remained loyal to Christian interpretations. For every article of the *Summa Theologica* is a simplified imitation of oral instruction and each article is caught up in larger dialectical patterns.[56]

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle denominates four causes as the fundamental principles that rule the cosmos (*κόσμος*), namely the 1) efficient, 2) material, 3) formal, and 4) final cause.[57] These, however, only explain the sublunary world and hence, they lack in respect to the spiritual realm. As Aristotle's scientific and empirical methods of demonstration pervade the exposition of his thought, the four causes had emerged from natural observations, akin, in terms of origin, to the ideas of potentiality and actuality. In turn, St. Thomas' use of the Aristotelian causes is ubiquitous throughout the *Summa Theologica*, both directly and indirectly. The following passages have as purpose to provide a glimpse of the ways in which St. Thomas employs the four aforementioned demonstrative principles: "Since nature works for a determinate end under the direction of a higher agent, whatever is done by nature must needs be traced back to God, as to its first cause."[58] Moreover, when "therefore I speak of the existence of man, or horse, or anything else, existence is considered a formal principle, and as something received"[59], and "it is plain that the effect pre-exists virtually in the efficient cause: and although to pre-exist in the potentiality of a material cause is to pre-exist in a more imperfect way, since matter as such is imperfect, and an agent as such is perfect; still to pre-exist virtually in the efficient cause is to pre-exist not in a more imperfect, but

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[50] Ibid., VI, p. 188.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Thomas Taylor, *A Dissertation on the Philosophy of Aristotle* (Walworth: Prometheus Trust, 1812), I, p.4.
[54] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (California: Coyote Canyon Press, 2018), I, Q. 2, Art. 3, p. 31.
[55] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books, 2004), XII, 1073a.
[56] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (California: Coyote Canyon Press, 2018), I, Q. 12, Art. 1, p. 46.
[57] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books, 2004), V, 1013a.
[58] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (California: Coyote Canyon Press, 2018), I, Q. 2, Art. 3, p. 31.
[59] Ibid., I, Q. 4, Art. 1, p. 34.

in a more perfect way."[60] St. Thomas' use of the Stagirite's causes mirrors the same dynamic and functionality expounded by the latter. For Aristotle seems to understand divinity as manifested within nature, as an ascent from the visible to the intelligible, but only by virtue of causation in a limited realm of ideas and not by participation in personal ideals.

Throughout all of the Platonic dialogues, the notion of *participation* in ideas and ideals is continuous and functions as the means by which the natural world interacts analogously and anagogically with the intelligible realm. In providing a systematic demonstration of Platonic thought, Proclus denominates seven causes, in contrast with Aristotle's four, that encompass the higher functions of causation and participation. Namely, they are the 1) *One* Ineffable Cause, the 2) paradigmatic, 3) formal, 4) creative, 5) instrumental, 6) material and 7) final cause, that not only differentiate the Peripatetic tradition from the Platonic one, but shift the focus from the sublunary realm to the intelligible one, in addition to the afferent relationship and reciprocal participation of the two.[61] For the creative cause, Proclus posits, as seen within the productive manifestation of the Creator, takes place by its "very being" ('τῶ *εἶναι*')[62], "effortless and we must concede that effortlessness belongs primarily to the divine."[63] The idea of creation by means of abundance and "effortlessness" is devoid of the diminishing dynamic of human creation, for all kinds of production processes that take place in the realm of the latter are actualized by means of a higher meaning of sacrifice, be that intellectual, physical, or temporal. Proclus goes further in stating that the highest creative cause is imperative to be endowed with volition, namely the *One*, or God-- if this could be translated in Christian terms.[64] Furthermore, the instrumental cause is said to be representative of the participation of all *beings* in the brilliant light of Providence[65] in addition to the continuous governing of the *unparticipated*, *participated* and *immanent* classes of Ideas over the visible and intelligible realms.[66] The paradigmatic cause, however, is assigned strictly to the world of Platonic Ideas and their relationship with the world, as existing within the soul.[67] The aforementioned lay the conditions for the created intellect to ascend to an understanding of the *Self*, or the *One*, as more commonly translated, by training the "purest intuition of the soul" [68] for this encounter. The Idea of the *Self* in Platonic thought has been rediscovered and is widely researched by Pierre Grimes.[69] As Aristotle's four causes do away with the idea of *participation*, the Platonic and Peripatetic traditions become irreconcilable in this respect. As seen within St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, the respective profound influence exerted by Aristotle and his translations poses a great difficulty, an impossibility, indeed, in reconciling Platonism and St. Thomas Aquinas' systematic theology.

The natural use of *αὐτός* and *λόγος* in Aristotle's works attempt, possibly, to build an intellectual bridge by which the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, constructed through the lens of Pseudo-Dionysius and his Christian-Mystical conversion of Neoplatonist Proclus' commentaries, may be able to ascend to the Platonic tradition. For *αὐτός*, may also stand to be translated as *Self*, and it signifies the recognition of excellence and divinity and can serve as accompanying the *One*, in certain instances,

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[60] Ibid., I, Q. 4, Art. 2, p. 34.
[61] Proclus, *Commentary on 1st Alcibiades*, trans. Juan F. Balboa (San Jacinto: Lulu Books, 2020), 106A.
[62] Proclus, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), III, 787ff.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid., IV, 953ff.
[66] Ibid., V, 985ff.
[67] Ibid., V, 982ff.
[68] Ibid., V, 994ff.
[69] Pierre Grimes, Regina Uliana, *Philosophical Midwifery: A New Paradigm for Understanding Human Problems with its Validation* (Costa Mesa: Hyparxis Press, 1998); Pierre Grimes, „The Betrayal of Philosophy: Rediscovering the *Self* in Plato's Parmenides", *Journal of the APPA*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (2016), 1752 – 1758.

in Plato's *Parmenides*. For the purpose of exploring this matter of inquiry, we will proceed by displaying a few Greek quotes from the *Metaphysics*, which will then be contrasted with Hugh Lawson-Tancred's translation of them.

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle states:

> "ὁ δ'αὐτὸς λόγος καὶ ἐπὶ γραμμῆς καὶ στιγμῆς καὶ μονάδος"[70], "ἀλλὰ μὴν οὐ μόνον ἕν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ λόγος ὁ αὐτὸς αὐτῶν, ὡς δῆλον καὶ ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων"[71], and "ἐπεὶ δὲ ὁ ὁρισμὸς λόγος ἐστί, πᾶς δὲ λόγος μέρη ἔχει, ὡς δὲ ὁ λόγος πρὸς τὸ πρᾶγμα, καὶ τὸ μέρος τοῦ λόγου πρὸς τὸ μέρος τοῦ πράγματος ὁμοίως ἔχει, ἀπορεῖται ἤδη πότερον δεῖ τὸν τῶν μερῶν λόγον ἐνυπάρχειν ἐν τῷ τοῦ ὅλου λόγῳ ἢ οὔ."[72]

In the same order, Hugh Lawson-Tancred translates:

> "And it is also clear that this applies to points, lines, and planes"[73], "more to the point, the account of each is the same, as even the present arguments have shown"[74], and "The definition is an *account*. Now every account has its parts, and there is an isomorphism between the relation of the account to the entity that it concerns and the relation of a part of the account to a part of the entity."[75]

At 1002b, an alternate translation may apply:

> "And it is also clear that the *Self Logos* applies to points, lines, and planes" and, at 1031b-1032a, the passage may go as follows: "more to the point, the *Logos* of each is the *Self*, as even the present arguments have shown." Lastly, for 1034b, the literal translation of the word *λόγος* is: "The definition is the *Logos*. Now every *Logos* has its parts, and there is an isomorphism between the relation of the *Logos* to the entity that it concerns and the relation of a part of the *Logos* to a part of the entity."

When translated in this manner, the spiritual dimension of the text is evinced, such that the empirical "account" becomes *Logos*, the fundamental ordering principle of the cosmos. Similarly, in the *Gospel of John*, "In the beginning was the Word (*Logos*)"[76] or "the *Logos* was the in the Cause/Source/First Principle"[77], the *Logos* is the Son of God and that through which the act of creation is actualized. The translation of *αὐτός* as *Self*-- which appears 1219 times in *Metaphysics*[78], however, brings a new, yet, perhaps originally intended vitality even to Aristotle's thought and it raises the meaning and implications of his natural and systematic philosophy, a topic of paramount significance which will be explored in an upcoming scholarly project. These differences in translation would shift both the spiritual end goal and the means to attaining it, an idea reiterated by Thomas Taylor who explains through the use of Simplicius' *Commentary on the Physics of Aristotle* that "in his acroamatic writings, he [Aristotle] studies obscurity, through this deterring the more indolent, as if their very appearance evinced they were not written for them."[79] Aristotle's writings follow the exoteric, historical, natural lines of thought which do not pay attention to extreme

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[70] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books, 2004), III, 1002b.
[71] Ibid., VII, 1031b-1032a.
[72] Ibid., VII, 1034b.
[73] Ibid., III, 1002b.
[74] Ibid., VII, 1031b-1032a.
[75] Ibid., VII, 1034b.
[76] *The Gospel of John*, trans. Colleen Conway (England: Oxford University Press), 1.1, p. 1920.
[77] *The Gospel of John*, trans. Juan F. Balboa (San Jacito: Lulu Books, 2018), 1:1, p. 2.
[78] Adina Bezerita, *'γνῶθι σαυτόν': The Light of Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2020), p.1.
[79] Thomas Taylor, *A Dissertation on the Philosophy of Aristotle* (Walworth: Prometheus Trust, 1812), I, p. 6, p. 357.

accuracy, in contrast with Plato, after the manner of Pythagoreans, who contemplated whatever is natural as it partakes of the divine. Thus, the matter in question is one that ought to be expounded and analyzed extensively with more profundity of thought in an upcoming work. For now, this discussion notes the possibility of facilitating the conditions for a more complete understanding of St. Thomas Aquinas' theology, influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius and Aristotle as seen in the Light of Platonism and Neoplatonism.

Counterarguments

The modern world can be highly vexed by the light of the ancient wisdom and especially by ancient philosophy with its higher ideas and ideals to '*Know Thyself*' ('*γνῶθι σεαυτόν*')[80]. In this section we will briefly explore the positions of Thomas Cajetan, Martin Heidegger and Friedrich Nietzsche in respect to St. Thomas Aquinas' theology and its relation with ancient thought. Before exploring the aforementioned, I will proceed with making a distinction regarding the meaning of *essence* (*οὐσία*). For *essence*, as used by Plato and the tradition that followed him has a different dynamic and functionality as opposed to the Aristotelian use of the same term.

St. Thomas Aquinas posits in *On Being and Essence*: "Therefore, the essence clearly comprises both matter and form",[81] and "since, as said above, the essence is that which is signified by the definition, accidents will thus have essences in the same way in which they have definitions"[82]. As discussed in the section dedicated to the Thomistic theological framework of God, *essence* denotes the function of turning upon itself and is similar to how the soul is said to operate, being as it is, that towards which it moves, its own final cause. This dimension of *essence*, however, is only indirectly alluded to, by both St. Thomas and Aristotle, more predominantly in the former than in the latter. For, as explored by the two, *essence* has no vitality or dynamic function attributed to it, and neither does it have the capacity of endowing *beings* with the cognitive capacity of exercising the *dianoetic* powers of the soul. This is an idea that is representative of the Platonic tradition and whose meaning is lacking in respect to the works of Aristotle and St. Thomas. The former reiterates the position of St. Thomas in the *Metaphysics*, a work cited multiple times in *On Being and Essence*. Aristotle states: "Well, *essence* is, for each thing, what is taken to be per se"[83], and on "such grounds, then, it can be shown that the particular thing itself and its *essence* is the same",[84] and the "*essence* of a thing, whose account is a definition, is also said to be the substance of the particular"[85]. The argument goes as follows: definition is an account of *essence*, that is to say the parts of the whole without which the latter could no longer be denominated as that which it is. For instance, the *essence* of humankind will not comprise height, skin color, or other such accidentals, but it is imperative for it to behold attributes such as biped, rational, and moral. In summary, *essence* is the Aristotelian form of substance for the substance constitutes a "composite whole".[86] When exploring the nature of divinity and its relations with humankind, St. Thomas Aquinas most often uses '*essence*' in this sense and only implicitly alludes to the Platonic vision, as showed in the section mentioned above. This understanding of *essence* communicates a glimpse of the naturalist and scientific thought of Aristotle, devoid, at least in the literal approach, of the spiritual character and vibrancy of the Platonic language. Later interpretations of St. Thomas' works reflect this methodological and spiritual chasm between the two systems. For instance, Étienne

[80] Plato, *Alcibiades*, trans. W.R.M. Lamb (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), 124a-b.
[81] St. Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, trans. Robert T. Miller (1994), II, p. 2.
[82] Ibid., VI, p. 11.
[83] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books, 2004), VII, 1029b.
[84] Ibid., VII, 1031b.
[85] Ibid., V, 1017b.
[86] Ibid., VII, 1035a.

Gilson criticizes Thomas Cajetan, an ardent Aristotelian defender, to having interpreted the *Summa Theologica* from the perspective of a reductionistic ontology of substance, thus causing an incompatibility between philosophy and Christianity.[87]

In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger, influenced by Aristotle developing his thought through modern philosophers such as Francisco Suárez, stated that: "The 'soul' which makes up the Being of man has *αἴσθησῖς* and *νόησις* among its ways of Being, and in these it discovers all entities, both in the fact that they are, and in their Being as they are - that is, always in their Being. Aristotle's principle, which points back to the ontological thesis of Parmenides, is one which Thomas Aquinas has taken up in a characteristic discussion"[88] and that the "'dialectic', which has been a genuine philosophical embarrassment, becomes superfluous. That is why Aristotle 'no longer has any understanding' of it, for he has put it on a more radical footing and raised it to a new level".[89] It appears from these lines that Heidegger thinks that Thomas Aquinas is influenced by Aristotle's principle which he directly, yet, erroneously "points back" to *Parmenides*, disregarding the "dialectic", which is essential for this work, however, he deems it as a "genuine philosophical embarrassment". Moreover, Heidegger has not questioned or he has avoided the matter of translations, interpretations or thorough understanding of ancient texts. As it has been explored in the previous section, the understanding of Aristotle in respect to the Presocratics is at least questionable and uncertain, having begun to demonstrate the matter by the case of Democritus. Heidegger posits Aristotelian empiricism and scientific means on a higher level which illustrates his loyalty to the continental philosophy of his time in the context of mere intellectual analysis separated from personal meaning and metaphysical truth.

Friedrich Nietzsche, on the other hand, addresses the widespread belief system of Christianity and indirectly the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas as part of this tradition in *The Anti-Christ*. Nietzsche makes two crucial observations: that "mankind should fall on its knees before the opposite of what was the origin, the meaning, the *right* of the Gospel, that it should have sanctified in the concept of 'Church' precisely what the 'bringer of glad tidings' regarded as *beneath* him, *behind* him – one seeks in vain a grander form of *world-historical irony*"[90], and "Paul, with that rabbinical insolence which characterizes him in every respect, rationalized this interpretation, this indecency of an interpretation, thus: 'If Christ is not resurrected from the dead our faith is vain'. – All at once the Evangel became the most contemptible of all unfulfillable promises, the *impudent* doctrine of personal immortality. . . Paul himself even taught it as a *reward*! . . .".[91] It follows that Nietzsche denominates the Pauline interpretations as the main influence on the Roman Catholic Church, which includes neither Plato, nor Aristotle. He goes further by expounding that the doctrine of *Resurrection* as interpreted by St. Paul is the cornerstone of Christianity and that this interpretation is implicitly embedded within the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas. The subject of Pauline Christianity and its widespread ramifications enter a distinct realm of further inquiry separate from what has been explored throughout the totality of this paper.

Both Nietzsche and Heidegger posit modern counterarguments to ancient thought by their alliance to continental philosophy which is characterized by intellectual analysis devoid of the *Logos* of the *Self* and of its cognitive consequences. Each thinker shows that St. Thomas Aquinas encountered major problems and interpretations in the establishment of his theology, the matter having been implicitly stated by Nietzsche while directly evinced by Heidegger. Moreover, the Thomistic understanding of *essence*, as inherited by Aristotle and developed by thinkers such as Thomas Cajetan, provides an irreconcilable incompatibility between Platonism and St. Thomas Aquinas'

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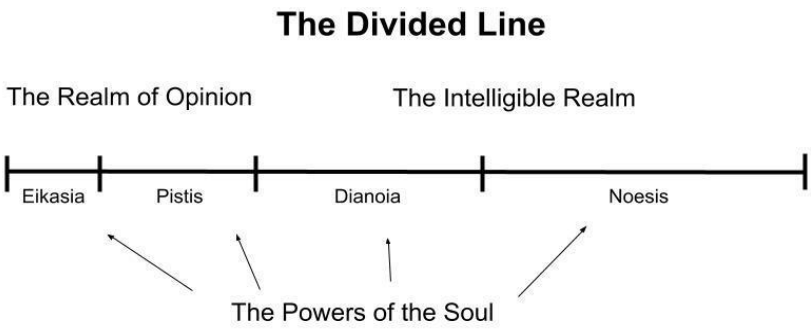
[87] Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), p. 80-83.
[88] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (England: MPG Books, 1962), I, p. 34.
[89] Ibid., Int. II, p. 47.
[90] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, trans. R J. Hollingdale (England: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 160.
[91] Ibid., p. 166.

theology. These perspectives also deserve future explorations in greater depth and detail.

Faith and Reason

The following inquiry will deal with another irreconcilable difference between St. Thomas Aquinas' emphasis on the primacy of *faith* over reason, the converse being true of Platonism.

St. Thomas' view of *faith* may be seen from the following passages: "Although those things which are beyond man's knowledge may not be sought for by man through his reason, nevertheless, once they are revealed by God, they must be accepted by faith."[92] And by "faith we hold many truths about God, which the philosophers were unable to discover by natural reason".[93] There are many other passages in the *Summa Theologica* evincing the same idea of the supremacy of *faith* over reason, in terms of knowledge of the divine. To St. Thomas, *faith* is above reason in the sense that it has a greater capacity for "super intellectual knowledge of God"[94]. The summarized argument goes as follows: since intellect exercises understanding by means of likeness and discursive reasoning, the highest vision of that which is beyond all knowing may be brought about by *faith*, inasmuch as it is removed from the bounds of reason.[95]



Eikasia = thinking in images of things apprehended by the senses alone. (irrational)

Pistis= belief or opinion, source of *eikasia*. (irrational)

Dianoia= the discursive property of the soul, scientific thinking, capacity for understanding both the immanent and the participated classes of Platonic Ideas, along with reason-principles.[1] (rational)

Noesis= source of *dianoia*, the most noble faculty of the soul which can be united with the unparticipated class of Ideas such as Justice itself, and Beauty itself; it also has the capacity for the highest vision of the divine.[2] (rational)

[1,2] Proclus; *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*; Book V 985.9 -986.18.

On the other hand, Plato, as seen from the model in the *Republic*, places *faith* third in rank from the highest function of the soul, intellect.[96] Both Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius consider that the means to ascend towards the transcendent *One* is through the negation of all *beings*, departing from all knowledge, opinion, belief and images, as previously discussed. A reference to belief is made in the *Parmenides* (141e): "but it seems that the *One* neither is one nor exists at all if one is to *believe* such an

[92] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (California: Coyote Canyon Press, 2018), I, Q. 1, Art. 1, p. 27.
[93] Ibid., II-II, Q. 1, Art. 8, p. 524.
[94] Ibid., p. 359.
[95] Ibid., Both the citation and the argument come from St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa of the Summa Theologica*
[96] The diagram and the definitions have as basis the description given in Plato's *Republic*, Book VI, 509d-511e.

argument"[97]. In exploring this passage, Proclus declares *faith* as "binding and uniting us to the *One*"[98] however, only by means of being united with the rest of the soul's cognitive functions.

Alan Cardew expands further on this matter when discussing the method by which Neoplatonic thought brings about an experience of divinity. In his work, *Antiquity and Anxiety*, Alan states: "For the Neoplatonic philosopher, what is important is the bringing around of the return in an individual's deepest being; this is the turn, the *epistrophe*".[99] By the practice of contemplation, dialectic, and other spiritual exercises, one may achieve such an experience as described in the previous sections. In this ascent, the discursive and reflective powers of the soul are directed towards the *Self*. This process mirrors the *One*'s intellection and thus it resembles God, for It is said to be the beginning and end of all *beings*. Accordingly, Alan unites the intellectual exploration with personal application: "The philosopher is the saviour of himself".[100] In contrast with Christianity, the Platonic tradition explores the divine through the *Logos* of *Self* ('ὁ αὐτὸς λόγος')[101] fully unindigent of the institutionalized belief system established by the Roman Catholic Church unquestioned by St. Thomas Aquinas.

While both Plato and St. Thomas Aquinas establish that the intellect alone may see the divine *essence*, they differ in respect to the most appropriate means of attaining this vision. The latter postulates *faith* as the luminous guide of the created intellect, while the former designates the *Logos*, the *dianoetic* powers of the soul, as being most cathartic and enlightening.

Conclusion

We can see traces and projections of Platonism and Neoplatonism in the foundation of Christian theology. Accordingly, St. Thomas Aquinas attempts to utilize an ascent to Platonism through the influence of Aristotle and Pseudo-Dionysius. While the discordance on *faith* has a significant impact on differentiating Plato from St. Thomas Aquinas, there are various other matters that relate the two thinkers. As shown above, Plato's *Parmenides* had indirectly impacted the Thomistic framework of "God" as displayed in the *Summa Theologica*, to the extent that the *One* and the Christian God have a share in identities and functions. Furthermore, Aristotle's translations, which are questionable to date[102], and his method and demonstrative precision also appear to have shaped St. Thomas Aquinas' theology. For, the structure of the *Summa Theologica* mirrors Aristotle's strict and successive style of writing. We note the aforementioned sources and influences on St. Thomas Aquinas' thought, including a loyalty to Christian interpretations and the historical, psychological and philosophical milieus of the times, which led to the development of his theological doctrine. This implies significant consequences that ought to be brought up for scholarly considerations. The profound nature of this inquiry deserves further investigation, which the previous discussion only touched upon. Our comparative study ought to be deemed as a general basis of a future and more comprehensive exploration on whether the Platonic tradition is or is not reconcilable with Christian theology.[103]

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[97] Plato, Parmenides, trans. Juan F. Balboa (San Jacito: Lulu Books, 2006), p. 32, Proclus, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), VII, 42K.

[98] Proclus, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), VII, 42K.

[99] Alan Cardew, *Antiquity and Anxiety* (England, University of Essex), p. 66.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Plato, *Parmenides*, ed. John Burnet (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 136b.

[102] Thomas Taylor, *A Dissertation on Aristotle*, (Walworth: Prometheus Trust, 1812), III, p. 215.

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