

Irrtum – Error – Erreur

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der Universität zu Köln

Herausgegeben
von Andreas Speer

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von Andreas Speer und Maxime Mauriège

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Vorwort

Gegenstand und Thema des vorliegenden 40. Bandes der ‚Miscellanea Mediaevalia‘, der auf die 40. Kölner Mediaevistentagung vom 12. – 16. September 2016 zurückgeht, ist der ‚Irrtum‘. Dies mag für eine Tagung, die gewissermaßen ein kleines Jubiläum darstellt, ein ungewöhnliches Thema sein. Denn dass die Forschungsgeschichte der mittelalterlichen Philosophie- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte, wie sie seit nunmehr fast 70 Jahren bei den Kölner Mediaevistentagungen und seit fast 60 Jahren in den ‚Miscellanea Mediaevalia‘ reflektiert wird, eine Ansammlung von Irrtümern gewesen ist, lässt sich wohl kaum behaupten. Vielmehr kann mit guten Gründen davon gesprochen werden, dass wir uns als Mediävisten miteinander nach und nach emporgeirrt haben, um eine Formulierung von Gerhard Vollmer aufzugreifen¹, und ein vielfältigeres Bild jenes Jahrtausends gewonnen haben, das als ‚Mittelalter‘ nur unzutreffend charakterisiert ist.

So haben wir auf der 40. Kölner Mediaevistentagung und folglich in diesem Miscellanea-Band auch die historiographischen Modi des Nichtgelingens, der Störung oder der Irritation, die unter dem Stichwort ‚Irrtum‘ verhandelt werden, einer Evaluation unterzogen – ebenso wie ein weites Themenspektrum epistemischer, praktischer und veridiktiver Sachverhalte. Und dies nicht allein aus der Perspektive der Negativität, vielmehr als Ausgangspunkt und Bedingung gelingender epistemischer Praktiken. Mithin ist es auch der Anspruch des vorliegenden Bandes, aus der Perspektive des Irrtums einen Blick auf die Möglichkeiten menschlichen Erkennens und Wissens sowie der daraus folgenden menschlichen Praxis zu werfen, ferner auf die institutionellen und historischen Bedingungen epistemischer Formationen, auf die unterschiedlichen Formen der Artikulation und des Umgangs mit Dissens und Misslingen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der spezifischen Rahmenbedingungen eines langen Jahrtausends, das sich selbst in Kontinuität mit der Spätantike sieht und weit in die Neuzeit hineinreicht.

Offensichtlich hat das Tagungsthema einen Nerv getroffen, denn erneut erhielten wir eine beeindruckende Zahl an Vorschlägen, die uns erlaubten, ein attraktives Tagungsprogramm zu formen, das sich in diesem Band widerspiegelt. Allen, die einen Themenvorschlag eingereicht haben, sei an dieser Stelle ausdrücklich gedankt. Auf diese Weise hat sich auch die Kölner Mediaevistentagung 2016 wieder als ein Ideenlabor erwiesen. Hierzu trägt nicht zuletzt der weitgespannte Freundeskreis bei, aus dem alle zwei Jahre mehr als zweihundert Wis-

¹ G. Vollmer, Wir irren uns empor, in: Skeptiker – Zeitschrift für Wissenschaft und kritisches Denken 8 (1995), 4–6, 4.

senschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftler aus allen Teilen Europas und der Welt nach Köln kommen. Auf diese Weise ist die Kölner Mediaevistentagung selbst zur Plattform für zahllose Forschungsaktivitäten geworden. Dies gilt im besonderen Maße für Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftler am Beginn ihrer Laufbahn. Hierfür steht exemplarisch die European Graduate School for Ancient and Medieval Philosophy (EGSAMP), die 2006 in Köln gegründet wurde und deren Planungstreffen alle zwei Jahre im Anschluss an das Internationale Kolloquium am Vorabend der jeweiligen Mediaevistentagung stattfindet. Diese Idee eines offenen europäischen Forschungsraums gilt es gerade auch mit Blick auf den wissenschaftlichen Nachwuchs angesichts der gegenwärtigen politischen Irritationen offensiv zu verteidigen und fortzuentwickeln.

Ein besonderer Dank gilt der Leitung und dem Team des Museums des Erzbistums Köln Kolumba, namentlich Herrn Dr. Stefan Kraus und Dr. Marc Steinmann. Sie haben am Tag nach der Eröffnung ihrer neuen Jahresausstellung, die stets am 14. September stattfindet und in Köln ein wichtiger kultureller *jour fixe* ist, das Museum Kolumba am Abend für die Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmer der Kölner Mediaevistentagung geöffnet. Wir konnten exklusiv die wunderbare neue Ausstellung „*Pas de deux*“ in dem architektonisch spektakulären Rahmen des Zumthor-Baus besuchen und den Abend mit einem Empfang aus Anlass der 40. Kölner Mediaevistentagung im Foyer des Museums beschließen.

Eine unerlässliche Voraussetzung für die erfolgreiche Durchführung der Kölner Mediaevistentagung und somit auch für das Zustandekommen dieses Bandes der ‚*Miscellanea Mediaevalia*‘ zählt die großzügige Unterstützung der Tagung durch die Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft und durch die Otto Wolff-Stiftung. Hierfür danken wir von Herzen auch im Namen aller Teilnehmerinnen und Teilnehmer.

Auch bei der 40. Kölner Mediaevistentagung lagen Vorbereitung und Durchführung unserer mediävistischen Biennale wiederum in den ebenso engagierten wie bewährten Händen der Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeiter des Thomas-Instituts. Stellvertretend gilt unser Dank Frau Petra Abendt, die seit vielen Jahren das Tagungssekretariat leitet, und Herrn Dipl.-Bibliothekar Wolfram Klatt, der während der Tagung nicht nur die Bücherausstellung organisiert. Auch bei den redaktionellen Arbeiten für diesen Band konnten wir uns auf die Expertise und auf den Einsatz der Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeiter des Thomas-Instituts stets verlassen. Namentlich gedankt seien Lee Klein für die englische Sprachkorrektur sowie David Metternich für die Registerarbeit, die bekanntlich immer unter Zeitdruck stattfindet und abermals einen umfangreichen Band betrifft.

Auch dieses Mal gilt der abschließende Dank dem Verlag Walter de Gruyter, namentlich Frau Katja Brockmann, für die stets gute Zusammenarbeit und für die hervorragende Ausstattung des Bandes.

Köln, im Juni 2018

Andreas Speer
Maxime Mauriège

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Irren ist menschlich!

ANDREAS SPEER (Köln)

I.

Entschuldigen Sie, ich glaube, ich habe mich geirrt! Zumeist fällt es uns schwer, einen Irrtum zuzugeben – vor allem, wenn es sich nicht nur um eine Marginalie handelt. Warum ist das so? Sich zu irren, geht uns gegen den Strich, gegen unsere natürliche Einstellung zur Welt, auf die wir uns affirmativ beziehen. Wir unterstellen – folgen wir unserer alltäglichen natürlichen Einstellung – oder antizipieren zumindest in unserem Erkennen und Handeln, dass Dinge so sind, wie sie uns erscheinen und wie wir sie erkennen, dass wir mit unserem Handeln das intendierte Ziel erreichen, dass wir in einer Situation richtig handeln. Thomas von Aquin führt diese natürliche Einstellung auf eine „*inclinatio naturalis*“ zurück, der gemäß wir in unserem Erkennen das Wahre, in unserem Handeln das Gute intendieren¹. Deshalb wohne auch allen Menschen das natürliche Verlangen inne, Irrtümer zu vermeiden und sie zu widerlegen, sofern es in ihrer Macht steht².

Und doch irren wir uns von Fall zu Fall. Irren ist menschlich: „*errare humanum est*“ – so sagt es ein oft zitiertes Sprichwort. Irren scheint ein unvermeidlicher Teil des menschlichen Wissens zu sein, insofern Menschen etwas wissen können. Es scheint zu der Vernunft, die wir haben, und zu der Art, wie wir Wissen erlangen, zu gehören, dass wir uns dabei auch irren können. Irren zu können, ist also ein spezifisches Merkmal gerade der menschlichen Vernunft, nicht jedoch einer absolut gedachten göttlichen Vernunft. Absolut, d. h. abgelöst von den oftmals kontingenten Bedingungen, unter denen wir unser Wissen gewinnen, nämlich abhängig von täuschungsanfälligen Sinnesvermögen und fehlerbehafteten Schlussfolgerungen. Gleiches gilt für unser Handeln. Auch hier können wir eine Situation falsch einschätzen oder uns im Ziel irren.

¹ Thomas de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, I^a-II^{ae}, q. 94, a. 2, corp., ed. Commissio Leonina, in: *Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia*, vol. VII, Rom 1892, 170: „*Tertio modo inest homini inclinatio ad bonum secundum naturam rationis, quae est sibi propria, sicut homo habet naturalem inclinationem ad hoc quod veritatem cognoscat de Deo, et ad hoc quod in societate vivat.*“ Cf. *ibid.*, q. 1, a. 1, corp., vol. VI, Rom 1891, 6: „*Manifestum est autem quod omnes actiones quae procedunt ab aliqua potentia, causantur ab ea secundum rationem sui obiecti. Obiectum autem voluntatis est finis et bonum.*“

² *Id.*, *De unitate intellectus*, prooem., ed. Commissio Leonina, in: *Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia*, vol. XLIII, Rom 1976, 291,1–4: „*Sicut omnes homines naturaliter scire desiderant veritatem, ita naturale desiderium inest hominibus fugiendi errores, et eos cum facultas adfuerit confutandi.*“

Irren ist eben menschlich! Erstaunlicherweise gibt es in der Antike nur sehr wenige Belegstellen für dieses oft zitierte Adagium. Eine solche Belegstelle findet sich in einer Predigt (Sermo 164) des Augustinus: „*Humanum fuit errare, diabolicum est per animositatem in errore manere*“³. Es ist zwar menschlich zu irren, teuflisch aber, aus falscher Leidenschaft im Irrtum zu verharren. – Hier ist er wieder: der Vorbehalt gegenüber dem Irrtum. Und Augustinus fährt fort: Am besten wäre es, wenn wir überhaupt nicht irren, sondern uns nach Möglichkeit darum bemühen, den Irrtum zu „emendieren“⁴. Auf eine Möglichkeit der Irrtumsvermeidung verweist Augustinus in einer anderen Predigt: Es sei Zeichen eines gesunden Geistes (*sanum ingenium*), dass er nicht an Gottes statt verehrt zu werden, vielmehr den zu verehren wünscht, von dem er erleuchtet werden will. Denn ein von Gott nicht erleuchteter menschlicher Geist kann irren, da er verdunkelt ist in seinen Irrtümern⁵.

Falsche Leidenschaft und Selbstüberhebung als vermeidbare Gründe für den Irrtum – das sind typisch augustininische Motive ebenso wie Augustins Kritik an einem allein um seiner selbst willen erstrebten menschlichen Wissen, das sich nicht auf die Erlangung des Ewigen richtet und folglich unter dem Vorbehalt der „überflüssigen Eitelkeit“ (*supervacua vanitas*) und der „schädlichen Neugier“ (*noxia curiositas*) steht⁶. Doch zugleich verteidigt Augustinus vehement – vor allem gegen die Behauptung der sogenannten akademischen Skepsis, dass nichts erkannt werden könne („*nihil posse percipi*“) sowie keiner Sache zugestimmt werden dürfe („*nulli rei debere assentiri*“)⁷, und dass keine Handlung begehe, wer nichts anerkennt („*ut nihil ageret qui nihil adprobaret*“)⁸ – die Möglichkeit zu wissen bzw. zu handeln, setzen doch auch diese Aussagen der Skeptiker bereits eine elementare Form der Zustimmung voraus: nämlich dass zumindest diese

³ Augustinus, Sermo 164, c. 10, n. 14, ed. J.-P. Migne, in: Patrologia Latina, vol. 38, Paris 1865, coll. 901 sq. Cf. Cicero, In M. Antonium Orationes Philippicae, 12, 5, ed. P. Fedeli (M. Tulli Ciceronis scripta quae manserunt omnia, Fasc. 28), Leipzig 21986, 146,27: „*Cuiusvis hominis est errare, nullius nisi insipientis perseuerare in errore*.“ Dazu cf. M. Schumacher, „... ist menschlich“. Mittelalterliche Variationen einer antiken Sentenz“, in: Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur 119/2 (1990), 163–170.

⁴ Ibid., col. 902: „*Melius quidem erat si nunquam erraremus: sed vel quod secundum est faciamus, ut errorem aliquando emendemus*.“

⁵ Augustinus, Sermones nouissimi (a F. Dolbeau in cod. Mainz, Stadtbibl. I 9 detecti), Sermo 26D (= 198 auctus), n. 24, ed. F. Dolbeau, in: Augustin d’Hippone, Vingt-six sermons au peuple d’Afrique, retrouvés à Mayence (Collection des Études Augustiniennes. Série Antiquité 147), Paris 1996, 383,522–523: „*Si ergo ingenium humanum potest errare sine duce deo, cum sanum est humanum ingenium, non uult adorari pro deo, sed eum uult adorari, a quo uult illuminari. Nisi quippe illuminetur humanum ingenium ab illuminante deo, tenebrosus est in erroribus suis*.“

⁶ Id., De Trinitate XIV, c. 1, n. 3, edd. W. J. Moutain/E. Glorie (Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina 50A), Turnhout 1968, 423,55–424,59: „[...] *humanarum autem proprie scientiae nomen obtineat, de qua uolumine tertio decimo disputauit, non utique quidquid sciri ab homine potest in rebus humanis ubi plurimum superuacaneae uanitatis et noxiae curiositatis est huic scientiae tribuens* [...]“

⁷ Id., Contra Academicos, III, c. 10, n. 22, ed. W. M. Green (Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina 29), Turnhout 1970, 47,4.

⁸ Ibid., II, c. 5, n. 12, 24,24.

Sätze gelten. Auch der Tor weiß nicht nichts, und derjenige, der ständig schläft und sich seiner Pflichten entzieht und zu nichts seine Zustimmung gibt, nimmt für sich in Anspruch, das Richtige zu tun. Augustinus macht diesen Zusammenhang ferner am Beispiel der Definition deutlich. Diese ist entweder wahr oder falsch. Ist sie wahr, so halte ich mit Recht an ihr fest; ist sie falsch, dann lässt sich zumindest etwas erfassen, nämlich dass ich etwas Wahres oder Falsches weiß. Wir wissen also nicht nichts⁹. Mehr noch: wer zweifelt, ob etwas wahr ist, solle doch zusehen, ob er auch daran zweifelt, dass er es bezweifelt! „Und wenn es gewiss ist, dass du zweifelst, so forsche, woher diese Gewissheit kommt. Da wird dir ganz gewiss nicht das Licht dieser unserer Sonne begegnen, sondern ‚das wahre Licht, das alle Menschen erleuchtet, die in diese Welt kommen‘ (Joh 1,9).“¹⁰ Dieses klassische Retorsionsargument, das im Kern auf dem performativen Widerspruch zwischen dem Aussageinhalt (Zweifelshypothese) und den Implikaten des Aussagevollzugs (Inanspruchnahme des Bezweifelten) beruht, wendet Augustinus schließlich in eine positive Regel, dass jeder, der einsieht, dass er zweifelt, bereits etwas Wahres einsieht und sich dessen, was er einsieht, auch gewiss ist¹¹.

II.

In dieser augustinischen Linie bildet sich eine interessante und oftmals zu wenig beachtete Argumentationslinie innerhalb der Skepsisdebatten heraus, die bis in die Neuzeit verfolgt werden kann. Auch Descartes steht – selbst wenn er seine Quellen verschweigt – in dieser Traditionslinie, die Heinrich von Gent am Ende des 13. Jahrhunderts im einleitenden Artikel seiner ‚Summa‘ noch einmal magistral exponiert. Es ist gerade die Herausforderung als Magister der Theologie, diese als Wissenschaft zum einen in der Tradition des Augustinus, sodann aber gemäß den neuen Anforderungen von Seiten der aristotelischen Wissenschaftstheorie zu begründen, die ihn zu einer umfassenden Auseinander-

⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, III, c. 9, n. 21, 46,70–47,77: „*Ita comprehensibilibus rebus et definitio est et exemplum. utrum, ait, etiam ipsa uera sit nescio; sed quia est probabilis, ideo eam sequens ostendo nihil esse tale, quale illa expressit posse comprehendere. ostendis fortasse praeter ipsam et uides, ut arbitror, quid sequatur. quodsi etiam eius incerti sumus, nec ita nos deserit scientia. scimus enim aut ueram esse aut falsam; non igitur nihil scimus.*“ Cf. *ibid.*, II, c. 4, n. 12, 24,24–27.

¹⁰ *Id.*, De vera religione, c. XXXIX, n. 73, ed. K.-D. Daur (Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina 32), Turnhout 1962, 234,25–235,30: „*Aut si non cernis quae dico, et an uera sint dubitas, cerne saltem, utrum te de his dubitare non dubites, et si certum est te esse dubitantem, quaere, unde sit certum. Non illic tibi, non omnino solis huius lumen occurret, sed lumen uerum, quod illuminat omnem hominem uenientem in hunc mundum, [...].*“

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 235,38–40: „*Deinde regulam ipsam, quam uides, concipe hoc modo: omnis, qui se dubitantem intellegit, uerum intellegit et de hac re, quam intellegit, certus est.*“ Zum Retorsionsargument cf. K.-O. Apel, Das Problem der philosophischen Letztbegründung im Lichte einer transzendentalen Sprachpragmatik, in: B. Kanitscheider (ed.): Sprache und Erkenntnis. Festschrift für Gerhard Frey zum 60. Geburtstag (Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft 19), Innsbruck 1976, 55–82.

setzung mit der akademischen Skepsis veranlasst, die er mit ihren beiden Grundirrtümern, dass alles unsicher ist, und dass nichts gewusst werden kann, schon in seinem Prolog zitiert¹².

Gegenüber einer vorschnellen Einordnung Heinrichs in den Kreis jener Theologen, die die Frage der Erkenntnisgewissheit im allgemeinen wie im speziellen letztlich auf die göttliche Erleuchtung zurückführten und damit jeder Form einer skeptischen Einstellung gleichsam den Boden zu entziehen scheinen, nimmt Heinrich die skeptischen Einwände zum Anlass, gleichermaßen die Möglichkeit sinnlicher wie auch intellektueller Erkenntnis zu verteidigen. Beide Formen der natürlichen Erkenntnis sind zugleich die notwendige Bedingung dafür, die Frage nach der Möglichkeit der Erkenntnis im Sinne der augustinischen Suggestion weiterzutreiben, dass es letztendlich einer Erleuchtung bedarf, damit der Mensch etwas mit völliger Gewissheit erkennen kann, d. h. im Licht einer reinen Wahrheit (*sincera veritas*), die keinen Irrtum mehr zulässt¹³.

Die epistemologische Zuspitzung, mit der Heinrich nicht alleine dasteht, deutet auf eine implizite Kritik an dem aristotelischen Wissensparadigma, das von der habituellen Gegebenheit des Vorhergewussten ausgeht. Doch wenn ich überhaupt nichts wissen kann, dann kann ich keiner Sache gewiss sein. Wo Aristoteles und seine Nachfolger im Satz des Widerspruchs und in einigen selbstevidenten Prinzipien die erforderliche Garantie sehen – wer diese nicht akzeptiert, gehört nicht zu den am Diskurs Teilhabenden, sondern sollte wie eine Pflanze besser schweigen¹⁴ –, da fordert Heinrich wie vor ihm schon Bonaventura mehr: Es geht um ein unwandelbares und unfehlbares Kriterium, das entweder als Erweiterung der epistemologischen Bedingungen zum Hori-

¹² Cf. M. Olszewki, *Dominican Theology at the Crossroads: A Critical Edition and Study of the Prologues to the Commentaries on Peter Lombard's Sentences by James of Metz and Hervaeus Natalis* (Archa verbi. Subsidia 2), Münster 2010; id. (ed.), *What is „Theology“ in the Middle Ages? Religious Cultures of Europe (11th–15th Centuries) as Reflected in Their Self-Understanding* (Archa verbi. Subsidia 1), Münster 2007; G. Mensching (ed.), *De usu rationis*. Vernunft und Offenbarung im Mittelalter (Contradictio 9), Würzburg 2007; J. A. Aertsen/K. Emery, Jr./A. Speer (eds.), *Nach der Verurteilung von 1277. Philosophie und Theologie an der Universität von Paris im letzten Viertel des 13. Jahrhunderts. Studien und Texte (Miscellanea Mediaevalia 28)*, Berlin–New York 2000; A. Speer/F. Retucci/T. Jeschke/G. Guldentops (eds.), *Durandus and His Sentences Commentary: Historical, Philosophical and Theological Issues (Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales. Bibliotheca 9)*, Leuven–Paris–Walpole (MA) 2014.

¹³ *Henricus de Gandavo, Summa (Quaestiones ordinariae)*, art. 1, q. 1, ed. G. A. Wilson, in: *Henrici de Gandavo Opera omnia*, vol. XXI (Ancient and Medieval Philosophy. De Wulf-Mansion Centre, Series 2), Leuven 2005, 11–19; *ibid.*, art. 1, q. 2, 35–45. Cf. C. Kann, *Wahrheit und Wahrheitskenntnis bei Heinrich von Gent*, in: C. Steel/G. Guldentops (eds.), *Henry of Gent and the Transformation of Scholastic Thought. Studies in Memory of Jos Decorte (Ancient and Medieval Philosophy. De Wulf-Mansion Centre, Series 1, vol. XXXI)*, Leuven 2003, 157–175; M. Pickavé, *Henry of Ghent and John Duns Scotus on Skepticism and the Possibility of Naturally Acquired Knowledge*, in: H. Lagerlund (ed.), *Rethinking the History of Skepticism. The Missing Medieval Background (Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 103)*, Leiden–Boston 2010, 62–96, bes. 74–82.

¹⁴ Aristoteles, *Metaphysik*, IV [A], c. 4, 1006 a 11–15.

zont der natürlichen Erkenntnis gehört oder als spezielles göttliches Licht die erforderliche Klarheit und Gewissheit der Wahrheit verbürgt¹⁵.

Das Nachdenken über die Möglichkeiten der Erkenntnis schließt die verschiedenen Möglichkeiten des Irrtums, der Täuschung und des Nichtwissens notwendigerweise mit ein. Jedoch führen das Nachdenken über den Irrtum und die Möglichkeiten des Scheiterns nicht in die pyrrhonische Urteilsenthaltung. Diese Position scheint für die mittelalterlichen Denker keine seriöse Option. Dennoch ist die Frage nach einem Skeptizismus – darauf hat Dominik Perler hingewiesen – keine historiographische Fiktion¹⁶. Vielmehr steht sie im Dienst einer grundsätzlich affirmativen epistemischen Einstellung, eröffnet produktive Ausgangspunkte für die Frage nach den Grundlagen der Gewissheit unseres Erkennens. Der Skeptizismus erscheint als eine Irrtumsstrategie zwischen den Extremen, nichts zu wissen, auf der einen und einer absoluten Gewissheit auf der anderen Seite. Irrtum und Skepsis setzen voraus, dass es eine zumindest elementare Form natürlichen Wissen gibt. Im Grunde sucht der Skeptiker nach Gewissheit, nach der Möglichkeit, Irrtümer zu erkennen, zu unterscheiden und zu vermeiden. Die erforderliche Schärfung der Kriterien für die Erkenntnisgewissheit lenkt die Aufmerksamkeit auf Falsifikationsstrategien (Widerlegung, *reductio ad absurdum*), vor allem aber auf zumeist resolutive Vergewisserungsmethoden (*infallibilitas*- und *immutabilitas*-Kriterium)¹⁷. Hierbei besteht ein Wechselverhältnis zwischen der Schärfe des skeptischen Vorbehalts, dessen Widerlegung erstrebt wird, und der Reichweite der angezielten Vergewisserung. Dies zeigen die ausgefeilten Argumentationen von Protagonisten wie Bonaventura und Heinrich von Gent. Die von ihnen angelegten Kriterien machen einen Rekurs auf eine unveränderliche ewige Maßgabe (*ratio aeterna*) oder auf ein göttliches Licht (*lux divina*) unerlässlich, ohne dass dieses zur alleinigen Maßgabe des Erkennens würde¹⁸.

III.

Ganz in diesem Sinne geht es in diesem Band darum, den Irrtum nicht nur aus der Perspektive des Scheiterns und Misslingens, das möglicherweise Strafen,

¹⁵ Hierzu cf. A. Speer, Certitude and Wisdom in Bonaventure and Henry of Ghent, in: Steel/Guldentops (eds.), Henry of Ghent and the Transformation of Scholastic Thought (nt. 12), 75–100, bes. 89–95.

¹⁶ Cf. D. Perler, Zweifel und Gewissheit. Skeptische Debatten im Mittelalter (Philosophische Abhandlungen 92), Frankfurt a. M. 2006, 1–15; H. Lagerlund, A History of Skepticism in the Middle Ages, in: id. (ed.), Rethinking the History of Skepticism (nt. 12), 1–27.

¹⁷ Henricus de Gandavo, Summa, art. 1, q. 1, ed. Wilson (nt. 12), 11–19; Bonaventura, Quaestiones disputatae de scientia Christi, q. 4, conclusio, ed. PP. Collegium a. S. Bonaventurae, in: S. Bonaventurae Opera omnia, vol. V, Quaracchi 1891, 23b.

¹⁸ Henricus de Gandavo, Summa, art. 1, q. 2, ed. Wilson (nt. 12), 50 sq. und 62 sq.; Bonaventura, Quaestiones disputatae de scientia Christi, q. 4, conclusio, ed. PP. Collegium a. S. Bonaventurae (nt. 16), 23b–24a. Cf. A. Speer, Certitude and Wisdom in Bonaventure and Henry of Ghent (nt. 14), 90–95.

Verbote und Disziplinierungen nach sich zieht, zu behandeln, sondern im Kontext einer epistemologischen Einordnung als konstitutive, weil nicht vermeidbare Bedingung menschlichen Wissens zu begreifen, das seiner Form nach endlich ist – zumindest „in via“, wie es immer wieder heißt. Gegenstand dieses Bandes soll daher eine umfassende Evaluation epistemischer, praktischer, veridiktiver Sachverhalte aus der Perspektive jener Modi des Nichtgelingens, der Störung oder der Irritation sein, die unter dem Stichwort „Irrtum“ verhandelt werden. Dies soll aber nicht nur aus der Perspektive der Negativität geschehen, vielmehr soll gefragt werden, inwieweit der Irrtum zum Ausgangspunkt und zur Bedingung gelingender epistemischer Praktiken zu werden vermag. Man könnte vom Versuch einer Disambiguierung des Irrtums sprechen verbunden mit der Suche nach den produktiven epistemischen wie praktischen Anknüpfungspunkten im Irrtumsdiskurs.

Die Ambiguität des Irrtums zeigt sich beispielhaft bei Thomas von Aquin. So hält es Thomas für die vorzügliche Aufgabe des Weisen, die Wahrheit zu bekennen und den der Wahrheit entgegenstehenden Irrtum zu bekämpfen¹⁹. Ebenso unterstreicht er mit dem bekannten Adagium, dass „ein kleiner Irrtum am Anfang am Ende zu einem großen Irrtum wird“, die Notwendigkeit einer sorgfältigen Prinzipienreflexion in den Wissenschaften²⁰. Andererseits stimmt Thomas in seinem Metaphysikkommentar in das Lob des Aristoteles über diejenigen ein, die uns in der Suche nach der Wahrheit vorangingen und deren Beitrag unerlässlich für die Wahrheitssuche bleibt, auch wenn sie sich möglicherweise in der Sache irrten. Denn die menschliche Vernunft ist nicht zuletzt wegen ihrer Irrtumsbehaftetheit, sondern wegen ihrer Endlichkeit auf diese gemeinsame, generationsübergreifende Wahrheitssuche angewiesen²¹. Damit scheint

¹⁹ Das Eingangskapitel der ‚Summa contra gentiles‘ steht unter der programmatischen Überschrift: „*Quod sit officium sapientis*“. Zur Authentizität dieser durch die Tradition gut bezeugten Überschrift cf. ed. Commissio Leonina, in: Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia, vol. XV, Rom 1930, XXIXa (Einleitung). Cf. ferner R.-A. Gauthier, Saint Thomas d’Aquin – Somme contre les Gentils, Introduction, Paris 1993, 143–163. Ferner cf. A. Speer, Doppelte Wahrheit? Zum epistemischen Status theologischer Argumente, in: G. Mensching (ed.), *De usu rationis* (nt. 11), 73–90, bes. 75–77.

²⁰ Thomas de Aquino, De ente et essentia, Prol., ed. Commissio Leonina, in: Thomae Aquinatis Opera omnia, vol. XLIII, Rom 1976, 369a: „*Quia parvus error in principio magnus est in fine, secundum philosophum in I caeli et mundi, ens autem et essentia sunt quae primo intellectu concipiuntur, ut dicit Avicenna in principio suae metaphysicae, ideo ne ex eorum ignorantia errare contingat, ad horum difficultatem aperiendam dicendum est quid nomine essentiae et entis significetur et quomodo in diversis inveniatur et quomodo se habeat ad intentiones logicas, scilicet genus, speciem et differentiam. Quia vero ex compositis simplicium cognitionem accipere debemus et ex posterioribus in priora devenire, ut, a facilioribus incipientes, convenientior fiat disciplina, ideo ex significatione entis ad significationem essentiae procedendum est.*“ Neben diesem *locus classicus* finden sich noch weitere Belegstellen dieses offensichtlich beliebten Adagiums, das Thomas stets auf Aristoteles, De caelo et mundo (I [A], c. 5, 271 b 8–13) zurückführt; cf. auch Super I Sent., d. 2, q. 1, a. 5, expositio, ed. R. P. Mandonnet, in: S. Thomae Aquinatis Scriptum super libros Sententiarum, vol. I, Paris 1929, 77: „*Hoc enim est fundamentum totius fidei; quo destructo, totum aedificium subruit. Unde etiam dicit Philosophus, in I De caelo et mundo, text. 33, quod parvus error in principio, maximus est in fine.*“

²¹ Hierzu cf. meinen Aufsatz in diesem Band, 787 sq.

der Irrtum ein unumgänglicher Bestandteil eines wissenschaftlichen Fortschrittsbewusstseins. Doch ist dies nicht zu modern gedacht? Trifft dies auch für das Wissenschaftsverständnis des Thomas und seiner Zeitgenossen zu? Ich möchte diese Frage bejahen. Denn gerade die erkenntnis- und wissenschaftstheoretischen Debatten zeigen ein hohes Maß sich ausdifferenzierenden Problembewusstseins.

Doch was ermöglicht und garantiert überhaupt die Unterscheidung von Wahrheit und Irrtum? Welche Kriterien liegen einer solchen Unterscheidung zugrunde? Und wer ist unter welchen Bedingungen in der Lage und berechtigt, den Irrtum zu erkennen und als einen solchen festzustellen? Welche Instanzen sind schließlich an dieser Unterscheidung beteiligt und hierfür legimitiert? Hier tut sich ein breites Problemfeld auf, das sich zunächst aus dem Antagonismus von Irrtum und Wahrheit ergibt. Denn wie man von einer logischen und von einer epistemischen Wahrheit sprechen und diese von einer ontologischen und metaphysischen Wahrheit unterscheiden kann, wie man die hermeneutische der dialektischen Wahrheit gegenüberstellen, und wie man nach einer historischen, nach einer theologischen oder nach einer praktischen Wahrheit fragen kann usw., so kann man auf allen diesen Ebenen den Irrtum als Gegenbegriff zur Wahrheit vorfinden. Doch was heißt es, sich zu irren? Hier differenziert sich das Wortfeld auch bedeutungsmäßig deutlich aus: So steht etwa dem Irrtum (*error*) das Nichtwissen (*nescientia*) oder die Unkenntnis (*ignorantia*) gegenüber²². Damit sind unterschiedliche Niveaus des Irrtums angesprochen, die vom leicht zu behebenden Missverständnis über einen durch umfassende Information oder durch wissenschaftliche Bemühung zu behebbenden Mangel bis hin zu einem grundlegenden Dissens reichen, der nur mit Mühe, mitunter auch gar nicht oder nur gewaltsam aufgelöst werden kann. Anders als bei der Falschheit liegt beim Irrtum der besondere Akzent darauf, dass jemand seine epistemische Pflicht verletzt, z. B. weil er oder sie methodisch nicht sauber gearbeitet oder wichtige Fakten übersehen hat, die er bzw. sie hätte kennen können.

IV.

Der vorliegende Band möchte somit – aus der Perspektive des Irrtums und damit aus der Perspektive der Störung, der Irritation und des Nichtgelingens – einen Blick auf die Möglichkeiten menschlichen Erkennens und Wissens sowie der daraus folgenden menschlichen Praxis werfen, ferner auf die institutionellen und historischen Bedingungen epistemischer Formationen, auf die unterschiedlichen Formen der Artikulation und des Umgangs mit Dissens und Misslingen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der spezifischen Rahmenbedingungen jenes Millenniums, das wir aus abendländischer Sicht als Mittelalter bezeichnen. Zu

²² Cf. etwa Thomas de Aquino, *Summa theologiae*, I^a-II^{ae}, q. 76, a. 1–3 und *De malo*, q. 3, a. 7–8.

diesen Rahmenbedingungen zählen insbesondere die Fortdauer und Rezeption der hellenistisch-spätantiken Bildungstradition als des gemeinsamen Bezugspunktes für den interkulturellen Austausch und das in allen Kulturen gleichermaßen bedeutsame Spannungsfeld religiöser und theologischer Kontexte in Bezug auf die unterschiedlichen Wissensdiskurse. Daraus erwachsen charakteristische neue Konfliktfelder und unterschiedliche Lösungen für den Umgang mit als Irrtum qualifiziertem Dissens.

Im Folgenden seien sieben thematische Schwerpunkte benannt, die als Orientierungspunkte dienen können, die auf unterschiedliche Weise die einzelnen Beiträge und Sektionen untereinander verbinden.

(1) Den Ausgangspunkt bildet zweifellos der Schlüssel- und Referenzbegriff „Irrtum“ und seine terminologischen Äquivalente. Folglich gilt eine besondere Aufmerksamkeit dem Begriffsfeld von Irrtum in den unterschiedlichen – linguistischen, aber auch wissenschaftlichen, religiösen, fiktionalen etc. – Sprachen und um die Übersetzung aus einer Sprache in die andere. Denn es ist nicht zuletzt die Begrifflichkeit, die den jeweiligen Bedeutungskontext erschließt, was jeweils unter Irrtum zu verstehen ist, bzw. worin der Irrtum besteht.

(2) In epistemischer Hinsicht setzt Irren voraus, dass man etwas erkennen kann unter den Bedingungen interner Kohärenz und externer Referenz – also unter den Wahrheitsbedingungen, welche die klassische Logik als Schlüssigkeit und Gültigkeit bezeichnet. Das Irren liegt begründet in der Tatsache, dass wir dabei Fehler machen, dass wir uns irren können. Irren bedeutet somit zugleich das Faktum der Fehlbarkeit; es verweist auf die Grenze der menschlichen Vernunft, die weder unendlich noch unfehlbar ist, sondern sich in einer kontingenten Wirklichkeit zurechtfinden, sich in dieser orientieren muss.

(3) Von Interesse sind ferner die – argumentativen wie disziplinarischen – Praktiken, den festgestellten Irrtum zu korrigieren oder zu bekämpfen. In diesem Zusammenhang bieten z. B. Irrtumslisten und Correctoria nicht nur wichtiges Material für das Verständnis konfligierender Diskurse, sie vermitteln auch Einsichten in die zugrundeliegenden Kontrollmechanismen und -institutionen und in die entsprechenden Gegenreaktionen.

(4) Eine besondere Zuspitzung erfährt die Irrtumsfrage durch religiöse bzw. theologische Wahrheitsansprüche, die entweder einander widersprechen oder zu wissenschaftlichen Lehrmeinungen in einen Widerspruch treten. Hier tut sich ein weites Feld von Irrtum, Zensur und Rechtfertigung, von Häresie und Anathem auf, das spezifische Regularien und Praktiken hervorgebracht hat. Dies gilt nicht nur für kirchliche und religiöse Institutionen, sondern auch für die Universitäten. Zudem liegt es nahe, nach den Ähnlichkeiten oder Unterschieden im interkulturellen und interreligiösen Vergleich zu fragen.

(5) Wie aber steht es um die veritative Kraft des Irrtums? Denn der Irrtum verweist positiv auf die Fähigkeit der Unterscheidung. Was aber ist die Voraussetzung für diese Fähigkeit? Bedarf es hierzu eines unstrittigen Referenzpunktes, der irr tumorslos – möglicherweise von jedem Menschen – eingesehen werden kann?

(6) Die Unterscheidung zwischen einer falschen, irrigen und einer richtigen, wahren Meinung bildet die Grundlage jeder wissenschaftlichen Disputation. In der erfolgreichen Widerlegung einer falschen Meinung, im Erweis des Irrtums liegt ein Erkenntnisfortschritt²³. Hierin besteht die produktive Kraft des Irrtums. Gedankenexperimente wie auch naturwissenschaftliche Experimente, die mit falsifikatorischen Strategien arbeiten, sind ein wichtiger Bestandteil veritativer Verfahren. In welchem Maße wird diese Methodik reflektiert und als wissenschaftlicher Fortschritt interpretiert? Gibt es ein Lernen aus Irrtümern? Inwieweit kann ein Irrtum korrigiert werden und was sind die Bedingungen hierfür?

(7) Als anthropologische Kategorie bestimmt der Irrtum auch das menschliche Handeln. Was aber ist eine irriige Handlung? Irrt der Wille oder verweist der Irrtum auf die kognitive Komponente im Handeln und Entscheiden? In welchem Verhältnis stehen Irrtum und Täuschung? Welche Auswirkung hat der Irrtum auf die Schuldfähigkeit des Menschen?

Der vorliegende Band verfolgt diese Leitfragen durch zwölf Kapitel, denen vierzig Beiträge zugeordnet sind. Hierbei ist das erklärte Ziel, die Fragestellung des Generalthemas in der ganzen interdisziplinären Breite zu behandeln: anhand literarischer Stoffe und Exempel und ihrer möglichen argumentativen Strategien der Visualisierung; hinsichtlich der politischen und gesellschaftlichen Auswirkungen irriger Entscheidungen; mit Blick auf die Konflikte, die sich beim Kampf gegen den vermeintlichen Irrtum ergeben; in der lateinischen und griechisch-byzantinischen, in der arabischen und hebräischen Tradition; in der Alltagskultur, der Laien- und der Gelehrtenwelt.

Die letzte Sektion widmet sich der Frage der Mittelalterhistoriographie. Zum einen soll die Frage mit Blick auf die spätmittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Debatten, Polemiken und historiographischen Konstruktionen aus der Sicht der philosophiegeschichtlichen Rekonstruktion behandelt werden. Zum anderen soll – auch mit Blick auf die 65jährige Geschichte der Kölner Mediaevistentagung – nach dem Wandel im Verständnis der Mittelalterhistoriographie selbst gefragt werden. Hierbei gilt es nicht zuletzt die unterschiedlichen Tendenzen und Konzeptionen in den verschiedenen Disziplinen im Auge zu behalten. Denn während sich der Mittelalterbegriff etwa im Kontext der Philosophie- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte, die sich vor allem im letzten Jahrzehnt gerade den interkulturellen Austauschbeziehungen zwischen den vier großen Sprach- und Kulturkreisen gewidmet hat, zunehmend als problematisch erweist, weil er auf den byzantinischen, jüdischen oder arabisch-islamischen Kulturkreis eben nicht zutrifft, erweist sich das „Mittelalter“ in europäischer Perspektive in vielen Disziplinen noch immer als ein vergleichsweise robuster Epochenbegriff.

²³ Cf. L. Iunius Moderatus Columella, *Res rustica*, I, 1, 16: „*Usus et experientia dominantur in artibus, neque est ulla disciplina, in qua non peccando discatur*.“ Dazu cf. E. Lelli, „Errando Discitur“, in: *The Classical Quarterly* 58/1 (2008), 348. Zum frühhumanistischen Spruch „*Errando discitur philosophia*“ cf. *Conradi Celtis Protucii Panegyris ad duces Bavariae*. Mit Einleitung, Übersetzung und Kommentar herausgegeben von J. Gruber, Wiesbaden 2003, 88.

V.

Es gibt noch einen weiteren Anlass für die erwähnte Sektion zur Mittelalterhistoriographie: das ‚kleine‘ Jubiläum der 40. Kölner Mediaevistentagung und des 40. Bandes der *Miscellanea Mediaevalia*. Angesichts der gegenwärtigen politischen Situation macht es einen Sinn, an die Ursprünge zu erinnern. Die erste Kölner Mediaevistentagung fand genau einen Tag nach der offiziellen Genehmigung zur Errichtung einer „Forschungsstelle für besondere philosophische Aufgaben“ bzw. zur Gründung „des Thomas-Instituts an der Universität <zu> Köln“ durch den Kultusminister des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen am 10. Oktober 1950 statt²⁴. Die materielle Voraussetzung hierfür bot nicht zuletzt ein am 1. April 1950 vom amerikanischen Hohen Kommissar für Deutschland gewährter erheblicher Förderbetrag, welcher der Aufbauarbeit des seit der Ernennung von Josef Koch zum Ordinarius und Professor für Mittelalterliche Philosophie am 24. Mai 1948 in der Gründungsphase befindlichen neuen Instituts dienen sollte. Mit der Einladung „zu einer Mediävistentagung in Köln“ vom 8. August 1950, der am 20. September 1950 ein zweiter Rundbrief mit dem Tagungsprogramm folgte, verband Josef Koch das Anliegen, den „Gelehrten, die sich der Erforschung der Geisteswelt des Mittelalters widmen“, Gelegenheit zu geben, „sich durch Referate über den derzeitigen Stand der Forschung zu unterrichten und in gemeinsamer Aussprache schwebende Probleme zu klären“, wie dies in anderen Wissenschaftszweigen bereits üblich sei²⁵.

Auf diese Weise verfolgte Koch zugleich das Ziel, die historische Arbeit am Mittelalter interdisziplinär auszuweiten – gewissermaßen die Grundlage für das satzungsmäßig festgeschriebene Ziel des neu gegründeten Instituts, die bei der Untersuchung der mittelalterlichen Philosophie gewonnenen Erkenntnisse „für die Probleme unserer Zeit nutzbar zu machen“. Mit der Interdisziplinarität war eine zentrale Leitidee benannt, der die Kölner Mediaevistentagungen bis heute verpflichtet sind. Ein Gleiches gilt für die erklärte Absicht, dass „bei dieser Gelegenheit eine persönliche Fühlungnahme zwischen den Forschern vor allem wichtig sein dürfte“, die ihren sozusagen institutionellen Niederschlag in einem regelmäßigen abendlichen Beisammensein im Dozentenzimmer der Universität fand. Mit der Eröffnung der ersten Mediaevistentagung am 11. Oktober 1950 in Anwesenheit des Kölner Rektors Prof. Dr. Gotthold Bohne war die nicht ohne Turbulenzen verlaufene Vor- und Gründungsgeschichte des Thomas-Instituts abgeschlossen, das Institut etabliert. So wurde es auch im In- und Ausland zur Kenntnis genommen. Kein geringerer als Fernand Van Steenberghen schrieb

²⁴ Cf. Mitteilung des Kulturministers des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen („Im Auftrage gez. Prof. Dr. Dr. Konrad“) an das Kuratorium der Universität in Köln, Düsseldorf, 10. Oktober 1950 (I W/1,3-05 – 35 – 3 Nr. 6453/50).

²⁵ A. Speer, 50 Jahre Kölner Mediaevistentagungen: ein Überblick, in: J. A. Aertsen/M. Pickavé (eds.), *Ende und Vollendung. Eschatologische Perspektiven im Mittelalter* (*Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 29), Berlin – New York 2002, 36 – 47, hier 37 sq.

für die ‚Revue philosophique de Louvain‘ den ersten Tagungsbericht – eine Tradition, die sich in den folgenden Jahren fortsetzen sollte und eine wichtige Dokumentationsquelle für die Kölner Mediaevistentagungen darstellt²⁶.

Ich habe mir erlaubt, an diese Gründungsgeschichte so ausführlich zu erinnern, weil nichts davon im Jahre 1950 selbstverständlich war. Fünf Jahre nach dem Ende eines verheerenden Weltkrieges, den Hitler-Deutschland vom Zaun gebrochen hatte, kamen viele bedeutende Mediävisten nach Köln, viele davon aus Ländern, die massive Zerstörungen von Seiten der deutschen Wehrmacht erlitten hatten. Dass dies möglich war, lag zum einen an der außergewöhnlich großzügigen Unterstützung, die John O. Riedl, Professor für Mittelalterliche Philosophie an der Marquette University, mit dem Josef Koch noch 1944 die Edition der ‚Errores philosophorum‘ des Pseudo-Aegidius Romanus publiziert hatte²⁷, und der nach dem Krieg als Leiter der verantwortlichen „Education Branch“ der „U.S. High Commission for Germany“ tätig war, seinem alten Freund und Kollegen beschafft hatte, sondern auch und nicht zuletzt an der Bereitschaft der Teilnehmer – darunter neben Fernand Van Steenberghen Dom Henri Pouillon und Dom Odon Lottin aus Mont-César in Leuven und Philotheus Boehner aus Saint-Bonaventure –, die Einladung Kochs anzunehmen und nach Köln zu kommen. Die Namen der deutschen Mediävisten liest sich wie ein Who is Who der damaligen Mediävistik. Die erste Kölner Mediaevistentagung – die einzige ohne ein festes Thema – war der Versuch einer Bestandsaufnahme und zugleich ein Wiederbeginn der Mittelalterforschung nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg.

Die Kölner Mediaevistentagungen haben sich stets als Begegnungsorte verstanden – auch und gerade in schwierigen Zeiten: während der nicht minder schwierigen Nachkriegsjahrzehnte in der Zeit des Kalten Krieges. Wir haben den Fall der Mauer und des Eisernen Vorhangs erlebt. Erinnert sei an die Mediaevistentagungen der Jahre 1990 und 1992²⁸, die ganz unter dem Eindruck der neuen Freiheit und der neuen Möglichkeiten standen – Möglichkeiten, die wir heutzutage, wenn man die politische Landschaft in Europa betrachtet, im Begriff sind, leichtfertig aufs Spiel zu setzen. Die erschreckende Wiederbelebung historisch gescheiterter politischer Konzepte wie Nationalismus und Autoritarismus, vorgetragen in einer oftmals ebenso primitiven wie gewaltsamen Sprache, die nationalistische Egoismen und Xenophobie mit geistiger Enge verbindet, erfragt unsere Aufmerksamkeit – und unseren aktiven Widerstand. Gerade wir als Mediävistinnen und Mediävisten, die wir gar nicht anders forschen können als in

²⁶ Cf. F. Van Steenberghen, Le congrès des médiévistes allemands, in: *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 48 (1950), 554–556.

²⁷ Cf. Giles of Rome, *Errores Philosophorum*, ed. J. Koch, english transl. J. O. Riedl, Milwaukee (WI) 1944.

²⁸ Siehe die folgenden Tagungsberichte: Mensch und Natur im Mittelalter. Tagungsbericht von der 27. Kölner Mediaevistentagung, in: *Bulletin de philosophie médiévale* 32 (1990), 222–226; *Scientia und ars im Hoch- und Spätmittelalter*. Tagungsbericht von der 28. Kölner Mediaevistentagung, in: *ibid.* 34 (1992), 235–238.

einem weitgespannten internationalen Rahmen und dies als große Bereicherung, ja als Privileg erfahren, sollten unsere politische Verantwortung wahrnehmen und im Rahmen unserer Möglichkeiten für die geistige Freiheit, für Großzügigkeit und Großherzigkeit eintreten. Hierzu braucht es nicht viel mehr, als sich wechselseitig Gastfreundschaft zu gewähren, einander willkommen zu heißen und unsere jungen Kolleginnen und Kollegen zu unterstützen und zu ermuntern, ihrer Neugier zu folgen, die – wie Aristoteles zu Beginn seiner ‚Metaphysik‘ sagt – dem Drang entspringt, der eigenen Unwissenheit zu entgehen und Wissen zu suchen, nicht um eines Nutzens, sondern um des Wissens willen²⁹. Denn darin – das ist die Überzeugung aller Philosophie und Wissenschaft Treibenden in jenem langen Millennium zwischen Antike und Neuzeit über alle Sprach- und Kulturgrenzen hinweg – kann der Mensch nicht irren.

²⁹ Cf. Aristoteles, *Metaphysik I [A]*, c. 2, 982 b 19–21.

I. Unwissen und Nichtwissen

Augustine on Error and Knowing That One Does Not Know

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I. Introduction

Socrates continually confronts his listeners with the possibility of error; Augustine, as an admirer of Socrates, is equally aware of this possibility. But while Socrates and the academic skeptics who claim to follow him are apparently content to devote their lives to mere investigation of the truth without an assenting commitment to any particular truth claims, Augustine thinks we are obligated to do more. He devotes considerable attention to the resolution of these problems throughout his corpus, most importantly in his earliest philosophical work, *Contra Academicos* (written ca. 386–388), and his later ‘*De Trinitate*’ (written ca. 400–416)¹.

For Augustine, error can occur in at least four distinct ways, and one of his main purposes in ‘*Contra Academicos*’ is to show that having an overly narrow view of error focused on only one of those ways – namely, approving a falsehood as a truth – too easily leads to skepticism. He argues instead that erring can be a sin both of commission and of omission, and that failing to assent when one should assent is just as problematic as assenting when one should not. In both ‘*Contra Academicos*’ and ‘*De Trinitate*’, Augustine extends his position by exploring the ways in which one can achieve epistemic certainty. But in doing this, he also offers scattered remarks about how one recognizes that one has not yet achieved certain knowledge, and thus about how one can know that one does not know. It is here that Augustine’s views are the most muddled, since he simultaneously claims that we (as humans in this life) are ignorant in many fundamental ways, that knowledge of something requires knowledge of that thing as a whole, and that nevertheless we can know ourselves, which obviously involves knowing that we do not know. It is to this puzzling group of statements that the remainder of the paper is addressed.

¹ My primary sources and hence my citations for these works are two recent English translations: for ‘*Contra Academicos*’, I use Augustine, *Against the Academicians and The Teacher*, transl. P. King, Indianapolis–Cambridge 1995, 1–93; for ‘*De Trinitate*’, I use Augustine, *On the Trinity*, Books 8–15, transl. S. McKenna, ed. G. B. Matthews (Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy), Cambridge e. a. 2002. For the Latin, I use Augustinus, *Contra Academicos*, ed. W. M. Green (Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina 29), Turnhout 1970, 1–61 and Augustinus, *De Trinitate*, edd. W. J. Mountain/Fr. Glorie (Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina 50–50a), Turnhout 1968.

In this paper, I will begin (§ II) with a brief recounting of the most relevant Socratic maxims: that one should know oneself, and that Socrates himself recognizes that he knows nothing. I will then (§§ III–VII) examine Augustine’s responses to these maxims and the epistemic puzzles they produce. I will argue that despite the problems one can find in his views, Augustine’s account of error is not only more philosophically satisfying than that of the skeptical Socrates, but it is more practical as well².

II. Socrates and Error

It is well known that Socrates took special interest in the Delphic exhortation “Know Thyself!”; Plato mentions Socrates in this connection many times in his dialogues, including the (possibly spurious) *Alcibiades I* (see especially 124b, 129b ff., and 130e)³. In this work, which was seen as authentic by those in late antiquity, and in fact “introduced the [Neoplatonic] curriculum for three centuries”⁴, the exhortation’s importance to Socrates is especially emphatic. Given Augustine’s Neoplatonic background, as well as the constellation of questions he addresses in ‘*De Trinitate*’ when discussing self-knowledge, it is likely that he had first-hand knowledge (or strong second-hand knowledge through his reading of Cicero) of ‘*Alcibiades*’ I.

For the Socrates of the first ‘*Alcibiades*’, knowing oneself is reduced to knowing one’s soul (130e), and for him, a crucial part of this is coming to terms with one’s own lack of knowledge. As he puts it there, “is not it obvious that the reason you waver [...] is that you do not know?” (117a); and a bit later, he says that “the errors in our conduct are caused by this kind of ignorance, of thinking that we know when we do not know” (117d). Socrates’s life-long goal of questioning others in the hopes of inspiring them to care for their souls more than their bodies, wealth, etc. is precisely an attempt to help them realize their own self-knowledge.

Coincident with this belief in the soul’s need to know itself, however, are Socrates’s claims of ignorance, which are most famously stated in the ‘*Apology*’ 20d–23b. As he puts it:

² The most recent treatment of some of these issues is in B. Dutton, *Augustine and Academic Skepticism: A Philosophical Study*, Ithaca 2016. Cf. Dutton’s bibliography for references to earlier studies of the ‘*Contra Academicos*’.

³ My primary source for the ‘*Alcibiades*’ I is Plato, *Complete Works*, transl. J. Cooper/S. Hutchinson, Indianapolis–Cambridge 1997, 557–595.

⁴ F. Renaud/H. Tarrant, *The Platonic Alcibiades I: The Dialogue and its Ancient Reception*, Cambridge 2015, 110. For more on this topic cf. also W. Hankey, ‘Knowing as we are Known’ in *Confessions 10 and Other Philosophical, Augustinian and Christian Obedience to the Delphic Gnothi Seauton* from Socrates to Modernity, in: *Augustinian Studies* 34/1 (2003), 23–48; J. Siebach, *Self-Knowledge in Socrates and St. Augustine: A Consideration of Alcibiades I and Confessions Book 1*, Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, 1995.

“I am wiser than this man; it is likely that neither of us knows anything worthwhile, but he thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I do not know, neither do I think I know.” (21d)

Many scholars over many years have addressed this apparent conflict in Socrates’s thought, thus I will not attempt to do so. My interest lies in the way Augustine tries to resolve these difficulties for himself. We will begin by looking at Augustine’s first philosophical work, ‘Contra Academicos’, where the question of skeptical ignorance is at the forefront of the discussion. In the later *De Trinitate*, Augustine explicitly mentions “the command ‘Know Thyself’”⁵ in the process of explaining his views about self-knowledge, so it is clear that this sort of Socratic position is similarly of great concern to him.

III. Socrates as a Skeptic in the ‘Contra Academicos’

Augustine’s ‘Contra Academicos’ was influenced by many texts, most notably Cicero’s ‘Academica’, to which many of its arguments are addressed. Augustine’s main purpose is to show that, despite skeptics’ suggestions to the contrary, it is possible to prove philosophically that we can have knowledge, and also that it is ethically and hermeneutically problematic to think that the academic skeptics’ public professions of global ignorance are worth taking seriously.

Following Cicero, Augustine treats Socrates, at least initially, as an academic skeptic:

“Socrates himself, and Plato, and the rest of the Old Academicians ... believed that they were able to be shielded from error so long as they did not entrust themselves recklessly to any assent.”⁶

For such thinkers, the primary mark of a wise man is epistemic caution, since caution makes it less likely that one will overstate one’s knowledge claims, and thus less likely that one will err. As the academic view is explained through the words of the character Licentius, “Error seems to me to be the approval of a falsehood as a truth [...] someone who does not approve anything cannot approve a falsehood, and so he cannot be in error”⁷. And since nothing is certain, according to academic skeptics, “the wise man would never give his approval to anything”⁸. Moreover, because giving epistemic approval is required for knowl-

⁵ Augustin, *De Trinitate*, X, c. 9, n. 12, edd. Mountain/Glorie (nt. 1), 325,4: “*cognosce te ipsam*” (transl. by McKenna [nt. 1], 53).

⁶ Augustin, *Contra Academicos*, II, c. 6, n. 14, ed. Green (nt. 1), 26,13–16: “*Quod etiam ipsius Socratis Platonisque ac reliquorum veterum auctoritate probatu facile est, qui se hactenus crediderunt ab errore defendi, si se assensionem non temere commisissent*” (transl. by King [nt. 1], 39).

⁷ *Ibid.*, I, c. 4, n. 11, 10,36–40: “*Error mihi videtur esse falsi pro vero approbatio; in quem nullo pacto incidit, qui veritatem quaerendam semper existimat: falsum enim probare non potest, qui probat nihil; non igitur potest errare*” (transl. by King, 13).

⁸ *Ibid.*, II, c. 5, n. 11, 24,22: “*nihil unquam sapiens approbaret*” (transl. by King, 37).

edge, the “Academics held – or better, it seemed to them – that [...] the wise man knows nothing”⁹. The only way to avoid error, it seems, is to give up all claims to knowledge. Taken in this way, then, it is easy to see why Socrates’s exclamations that he knows nothing fit well with Augustine’s understanding of academic skepticism.

Augustine at this point commences a two-pronged attack on Socratic/academic skepticism: he expands the notion of error so that it is possible to err even if one does not profess to know anything, and he also argues that certain knowledge is in fact possible. The latter claim is proven in ways found throughout the later history of philosophy. Mathematical truths (e.g., that $3 \times 3 = 9$), disjunctive truths (e.g., that there is either one world, or not) and “seeming” claims (e.g., that it is true that it seems to me that I know things) are some of Augustine’s prime examples of such certain, unassailable truths¹⁰. I will not focus on these arguments here, but instead I wish to concentrate on his first line of attack. So let us examine the different kinds of error he introduces in this work.

IV. Augustine on Error in the *Contra Academicos*

Augustine discusses at least four distinct accounts of error in the ‘*Contra Academicos*’. The first is the most commonly acknowledged one, and it is definitely the primary one for academic skeptics. We can call this the “standard” account of error: epistemically assenting to a falsehood; that is, holding something to be true when it is false. Augustine himself never denies that this account is a correct characterization of error; instead, he argues that it is only part of the story, and thus that other accounts are operative as well.

The second type of error is what we can call the “doubting” account of error. On this view, which is even stronger than the standard account, one is in error when one epistemically assents to a claim one does not know to be true, even if it is in fact true. In other words, if one has any grounds for doubt about a claim, epistemic assent is automatically an error. In the ‘*Contra Academicos*’, Licentius attributes this view to Cicero: “If the wise man assented to uncertain matters then, even if they perhaps were to be true, he could not be free from error.”¹¹ Again, at multiple points later in the text, the characters Alypius and

⁹ Ibid., III, c. 4, n. 10, 40,89–91: “*Nam illis placuit, vel potius visum est, et esse posse hominem sapientem, et tamen in hominem scientiam cadere non posse. Quare illi sapientem nihil scire affirmarunt*” (transl. by King, 61).

¹⁰ Augustine discusses these types of knowledge claims most clearly in *ibid.*, III, c. 10, n. 23 and c. 11, n. 25, 48 sq. (transl. by King, 73 sqq.).

¹¹ Ibid., I, c. 3, n. 7, 7,21–23: “*si incertis rebus esset assensus, etiam si fortasse verae forent, liberari ab errore non posset*” (transl. by King, 9).

Augustine say that the academic skeptics held this view as well¹². This doubting account of error of course has echoes throughout later philosophical history, perhaps most famously in Descartes' 'First Meditation', where he says that:

“Reason now leads me to think that I should hold back my assent from opinions which are not completely certain and indubitable just as carefully as I do from those which are patently false. So, for the purpose of rejecting all my opinions, it will be enough if I find in each of them at least some reason for doubt.”¹³

Here, Descartes (qua first meditation skeptic) appears to accept both the standard account and the doubting account as errors, assuming that we take the phrase “should hold back my assent” in the first sentence of the quotation to confer an epistemic imperative on the thinker.

Augustine holds that this combination of accounts is problematic only if one also holds the belief that one cannot know anything at all, and thus that one is left either with falsehood or with doubt as the only options. His aforementioned arguments that certain knowledge is possible are meant to show this belief to be false. Academic skeptics, on the other hand, think that these are the only kinds of error, and that they can be avoided only by not assenting to anything: one can act on things as if they are true – as Augustine explains their view, one can act on the “plausible” or “truthlike” – without assenting to their truth¹⁴.

But Augustine does not like this approach. First, any attempt to characterize something as plausible or truthlike requires knowledge of the truth: one cannot know a son looks like his father, to use Augustine's example, unless one knows the father as well¹⁵. But he also attacks the skeptical position by expanding the range of what counts as error. For Augustine, error has both a positive and a negative sense: what I will call “positive” error is assenting when one should not, as we see in both the standard and doubting accounts, and what I will call “negative” error is not assenting when one should. This second, negative sense of error is fairly obvious when one looks at the Latin verb *errare*, for the word can mean either “to make a mistake” (in the standard sense), or simply “to wander”. In English, the holdover phrase “knight errant” shows this second meaning. It is not as if these medieval knights are going around foolishly making mistakes everywhere; rather, they are not finding that which they seek (the grail, a nice warm inn and a large mug of mead, or whatever). In German, of course, the verb *irren* also carries this same double meaning as does the Latin *errare*.

The third account of error, predictably, is what we can call “non-assenting” error; it is the primary sort of negative error Augustine discusses. As the charac-

¹² Cf. *ibid.*, II, c. 5, n. 11, 24,8–9 and 13–16 (transl. by King, 36); III, c. 14, n. 32, 54,70–72 (transl. by King, 82).

¹³ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in: *The Philosophical Writings Of Descartes*, vol. 2, transl. by J. Cottingham/R. Stoothoff/D. Murdoch, Cambridge 1988, 12.

¹⁴ Augustin, *Contra Academicos*, II, c. 5, n. 12, ed. Green (nt. 1), 24,27–28: “*probabile*” and “*verisimile*” (transl. by King [nt. 1], 37).

¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, II, c. 7, n. 16 and c. 8, n. 21, 27 sqq. (transl. by King, 41–45).

ter Trygetius puts it, “to be in error is always to be searching and never to find”¹⁶; that is, to err in this non-assenting sense is to be exactly the sort of skeptic that Augustine initially imagines Socrates to be. Licentius, who is defending the academic skeptics, finds trouble with this account, since he thinks it is simultaneously both too broad and too narrow. It is too narrow because someone who utters a falsehood (in our new terminology, commits a “standard” error) but is lazy – that is, someone who is not searching for the truth at all – would not be in error. It is too broad because someone who is on the correct path to the truth – Licentius imagines a man who is on the (correct) road to Alexandria but who dies along the way – would, by this third account, be in error, when in fact such a person would be nothing of the sort¹⁷. Augustine himself thinks such non-assenting error is in fact error, and he combats Licentius’s objections in two ways. First, he agrees with the skeptics that the standard account of error is in fact error; Trygetius’s new definition only covers one type of error, not all types. Second, Augustine points out some of the moral problems that would result if one were truly a non-assenting skeptic. Such a skeptic would not assent to any given moral code, and thus might, for instance, commit adultery or homicide¹⁸. This bad moral result, Augustine believes, shows that not assenting to a truth is just as problematic as assenting to a falsehood, and both are serious epistemic failures. And beyond these types of moral failures, Augustine also mentions the common anti-skeptical objections that one who assents to nothing would have no grounds for doing anything at all¹⁹.

The fourth type of error is what we can call “laziness” error; on this account, one errs not by assenting to something false or uncertain (as in the standard and doubting accounts), nor by failing to find what one is searching for (as in the non-assenting account). Instead, one can also err by not trying to find the truth at all. This is often the result of the doubt that results from previous epistemic failures. As Augustine puts it, this is “the common error that men, having found a false opinion, do not diligently search for the truth”²⁰. As with the non-assenting account of error above, Augustine sees this negative error as a significant sin of omission; one is showing intellectual neglect if one does not at least try to find the truth²¹.

To sum things up, then, Augustine agrees with the skeptics that we need to avoid error, but the possibility of positive error does not preclude us from

¹⁶ Ibid., I, c. 4, n. 10, 9,17–18: “*Nam errare est utique semper quaerere, nunquam invenire*” (transl. by King, 12). Cf. also *ibid.*, 9,2–3: “*Errat autem omnis qui semper quaerit nec invenit*” (transl. by King, 11).

¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, I, c. 4, n. 11, 10,57–62 (transl. by King, 14).

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, III, c. 16, nn. 35 sq., 55,1–57, 56 (transl. by King, 85 sq.).

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, II, c. 5, n. 12, 24,24: “*ut nihil ageret, qui nihil approbare?*” (transl. by King, 37); III, c. 15, n. 33, 54,9–10: “*qui nihil approbat, nihil agit*” (transl. by King, 83).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, II, c. 1, n. 1, 18,11–13: “*qui error omnium populorum est, falsa opinione inventae a se veritatis, nec diligenter homines quaerunt*” (transl. by King, 25).

²¹ Cf. also *ibid.*, III, c. 9, n. 18, 45,15 (transl. by King, 69), where Augustine talks about the academic skeptics’s “deplorable mental laziness” (“*mentis ingemiscendo torpore*”).

having an epistemic responsibility not only towards seeking the truth, but also towards assenting to it when it is found. In fact, he suggests in rather strong terms that the avoidance of negative error is even more important than the avoidance of positive error. As he says, “It is undoubtedly more monstrous that the wise man not give his approval to wisdom than it is for him not to know wisdom”²²! Socrates, at least if taken to be an academic skeptic, acknowledges positive error only and does not see negative error as something worth avoiding.

Perhaps the academic skeptics’ approach has its virtues, though. If we have an epistemic duty to assent to truths, as Augustine suggests, where does this responsibility end? Must we constantly re-assent to the truths we know, or must we be constantly searching for new ones? There are similar discussions in moral philosophy about the proper limits to one’s duty to right wrongs, and not merely to avoid doing bad things. Peter Singer, when arguing in favor of increased famine relief²³, for example, holds that we have moral responsibility to give most of our excess wealth to those in need. Others argue, however, that such a standard is too high; we cannot be expected to live our lives as what Susan Wolf calls ‘Moral Saints’; something is lacking in a person who devotes herself so single-mindedly to moral excellence, in her view²⁴. So too, we could refine Augustine’s position by arguing that our epistemic duty to assent to truths is severely limited, or, if we follow the academic skeptics, that the epistemic duty to assent is absent altogether.

In any case, Augustine sees this skeptical, positive-error-avoiding version of Socrates as being disingenuous when he claims to know nothing, because it is not entirely clear that he thinks this skeptical version of him is the true Socrates. Why? Later in the text, Augustine holds the explicit hermeneutical view that all of the academics, including Plato himself, had definite philosophical positions and thus assented to truths. He likens the Academy to an ancient mystery cult, in which its most deeply held truths were kept from outsiders. The academicians, in his view, were simply too smart to have believed what they seemed to believe²⁵. Though he never directly attributes this sort of esoteric reading to Socrates himself in the *Contra Academicos*, my strong suspicion is that Augustine thinks Socrates also holds many things to be true despite his public proclamations to the contrary, especially given the way he lumps together “Socrates, Plato, and the rest of the Old Academicians” in the passage previously cited²⁶.

²² Ibid., III, c. 14, n. 30, 53, 26–28: “*Est enim sine dubitatione monstrosius sapientem non approbare sapientiam, quam sapientem nescire sapientiam*” (transl. by King, 81).

²³ Cf. P. Singer, Famine, Affluence, and Morality, in: *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1/1 (Spring 1972), 229–243.

²⁴ Cf. S. Wolf, Moral Saints, in: *Journal of Philosophy* 79/8 (August 1982), 419–439.

²⁵ Cf. Augustin, *Contra Academicos* III, c. 17, n. 38 and c. 18, n. 40, ed. Green (nt. 1), 58,50–59, 18 (transl. by King [nt. 1], 88 sqq.).

²⁶ Ibid., II, c. 6, n. 14, 26,13–16: “*Quod etiam ipsius Socratis Platonisque ac reliquorum veterum auctoritate probatu facile est, qui se hactenus crediderunt ab errore defendi, si se assensionem non temere commisissent*” (transl. by King, 39).

In other words, Augustine seems to believe ultimately that Socrates too finds problems with both positive and negative error. He might even say that Socrates is a crypto-dogmatist.

So, in conclusion, all of Augustine's work in the 'Contra Academicos' is meant to open up the possibility of knowledge, and thus of avoiding both positive and negative error, at least in some cases. But this is not to say that Augustine is epistemically careless, rashly asserting things with little justification. For him, skeptical caution and Socratic questioning are laudable as preliminary methods of investigation, but they should not be used to cut off assertions completely. As with Descartes many centuries later, skepticism is a useful tool, but it is not an end in itself.

We will now turn to Augustine's 'De Trinitate' (especially Books IX, X, XI, XIV and XV), and we will focus specifically on the ways he tries to set reasonable limits on our knowledge without denying its possibility altogether. More specifically, we will focus on his account of self-knowledge, since that too is something Socrates advocates pursuing.

V. Human Ignorance and Error in the 'De Trinitate'

In his later work 'De Trinitate', Augustine has the obvious goal of trying to make the Christian doctrine of the Trinity philosophically respectable, but along the way he also gives detailed analyses of the human mind and the epistemic situations we all find ourselves in. The text of 'De Trinitate' itself is more theological than philosophical in character, and the reliance on Biblical quotations is therefore much more pronounced than it is in the 'Contra Academicos'. (In the latter, it is almost completely absent in the main body of the text.)

Predictably, Augustine begins Book IX of 'De Trinitate' by citing a number of scriptural passages, and one such passage is particularly reminiscent of Socrates's claim of ignorance, that he knows that he does not know. This is how it is put in I Cor. 8,2–3: "If anyone thinks that he knows anything, he does not yet know as he ought to know."²⁷

Unlike Socrates's rather stark statement of his own imperfection – that is, against his capacity for knowledge in any sense – one should notice the hope implicit in the Biblical text above: one does not yet know. As Augustine explains things a few lines later, when paraphrasing I Cor. 13,12, "certain knowledge will only be perfected after this life, when we shall see face to face"²⁸. The human mind here is "weak and erring"²⁹, and it is seemingly incapable of knowledge.

²⁷ I Cor. 8,2–3, as quoted in Augustin, De Trinitate IX, c. 1, n. 1, edd. Mountain/Glorie (nt. 1), 292,10–11: "*Si quis se, inquit, putat aliquid scire, nondum scit quemadmodum scire oporteat*" (transl. by McKenna [nt. 1], 24).

²⁸ Ibid., 293,25–26: "*cognitio uero certa non perficitur nisi post hanc uitam cum uidebimus facie ad faciem*" (transl. by McKenna, 24).

²⁹ Ibid., XIV, c. 14, n. 20, 448,80–81: "*infirmata et errans*" (transl. by McKenna, 158).

When speaking of the Trinity later in Book XV, he says that it is “impossible [...] to fix your gaze upon this, so as to behold it clearly and distinctly”³⁰; a few pages later, he says that not only the Trinity, but God’s own knowledge is also “incomprehensible” to us³¹. Clearly, then, the scope of ignorance intended by the original passage includes, at a bare minimum, our supposed knowledge of God in this life. Though this knowledge is possible after death, it is not available to us here and now.

Perhaps drawing from his earlier Neoplatonic training, Augustine explains our current state as one in which everyone has “completely forgotten” the soul’s happiness with God³². One might be tempted to interpret this as Augustine’s metaphorical way of referring to original sin, and thus not as a reference to one’s own, personal (pre-birth) knowledge of such happiness, but the fact that he uses the term “recollection” multiple times makes it more plausible that he sees things Platonically. Augustine goes further than Plato and the Platonists, however. It is through faith in God and scripture, he believes, that one can eventually move beyond one’s present state of ignorance, and this faith provides the means of knowing of one’s ignorance of God. In other words, we can know (through faith) that we do not know God.

So much for God, then. What about knowledge of other things in this life? As Augustine told us in the ‘*Contra Academicos*’, and as he reiterates here by explicitly referencing the earlier work, we can in fact know many things (e.g., that we are now living, that we will things, etc.)³³. But this knowledge too is limited.

First, Augustine makes multiple mentions of the power of demons to deceive us³⁴. (We might call this “demon error” a fifth account, but though this is a live possibility for Augustine, he does not dwell on this fact. For our purposes, then, we will mention it only to put it aside.)

Instead, he focuses in on a few sub-types of standard-account sensory errors that occur (e.g., assenting to a straight oar’s being bent when seen in the water)³⁵. So how does he explain such errors? As he puts it,

“[...] the mind is certainly in error when it imagines [things] as being without in the same way as they are conceived within, either when they have already perished without and are still retained in the memory, or when ... that which we remember is formed [...] by the changeableness of our thought.”³⁶

³⁰ Ibid., XV, c. 27, n. 50, 532,89–90: “*Sed ad hoc dilucide perspicueque cernendum non potes ibi aciem figere*” (transl. by McKenna, 222).

³¹ Ibid., XV, c. 7, n. 13, 479,121: “*incomprehensibilis*” (transl. by McKenna, 181).

³² Ibid., XIV, c. 15, n. 21, 449,22: “*nec commemorari potest*” (transl. by McKenna, 159).

³³ Cf. *ibid.*, XV, c. 11, n. 21 and XV, c. 12, n. 22, 490–494 (transl. by McKenna, 190–193).

³⁴ Cf. e.g. *ibid.*, *De Trinitate* XIII, c. 19, n. 24, 416,46: “*deceptores daemones*” (transl. by McKenna, 132).

³⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, XV, c. 11, n. 21, 490,14–491,17 (transl. by McKenna, 190).

³⁶ Ibid., XI, c. 8, n. 13, 350,33–37: “*errat quidem animus cum eas opinatur eo modo foris esse quomodo intus cogitat vel cum iam interierunt foris et adhuc in memoria retinentur, vel cum aliter etiam quod meminimus non recordandi fide sed cogitandi uarietate formatur*” (transl. by McKenna, 76).

That is, we sometimes err either by misremembering a thing, or thinking something exists because we remember it when in fact it has ceased to exist. As he explains the phenomenon in another spot:

“If that will [...] concentrates exclusively on that inner phantasy ... not even reason itself can distinguish whether the body itself is seen without, or something of the kind is thought within.”³⁷

The skeptics are correct in such instances; knowledge of the external world is seemingly closed off to us, for “the mind errs when it binds itself to these images”³⁸.

Furthermore,

“the bodies themselves are by no means in our mind when we think of them, but only their likenesses. Were we, therefore, to approve of the object for the image, we would be in error, for the approval of one thing for another is an error.”³⁹

Augustine ultimately attributes all such errors to an improper joining of the bodily and the mental; if we can learn to separate the two, there is a path out of this entire class of standard-account errors. He tells us of the mind’s

“shameful error, that it can no longer distinguish the images of sensible things from itself [...].When it is [...] commanded to know itself, it should not [...] be withdrawn from itself, but it should rather withdraw what it has added to itself.”⁴⁰

Of course, this does not provide us with a means for knowing external objects, but it does tell us that at least one other thing can be known: one’s self. In order to know oneself, as Socrates asks us to do, Augustine holds that one must strip away everything sensible and bodily, thus allowing us to avoid the negative error of non-assent, while also avoiding the positive, standard-account error of assenting to a sensory claim about the external world that is not in fact true. So let us turn next to an examination of what exactly is involved in knowing oneself, according to ‘De Trinitate’.

³⁷ Ibid., XI, c. 4, n. 7, 341,2–9: “*si ad interiorem phantasiam tota confluerit atque a praesentia corporum quae circumiacent sensibus atque ab ipsis sensibus corporis animi aciem omnino auerterit atque ad eam quae intus cernitur imaginem penitus conuerterit, tanta offunditur similitudo speciei corporalis expressa ex memoria ut nec ipsa ratio discernere sinatur utrum foris corpus ipsum uideatur an intus tale aliquid cogitetur*” (transl. by McKenna, 68).

³⁸ Ibid., X, c. 6, n. 8, 321,1–2: “*Errat autem mens cum se istis imaginibus [...] coniungit*” (transl. by McKenna, 50).

³⁹ Ibid., IX, c. 11, n. 16, 307,7–10: “*non enim omnino ipsa corpora in animo sunt cum ea cogitamus sed eorum similitudines, itaque cum eas pro illis approbamus erramus; error est namque pro alio alterius approbation*” (transl. by McKenna, 37).

⁴⁰ Ibid., X, c. 8, n. 11, 324,6–13: “*Hinc ei oboritur erroris dedecus dum rerum sensarum imagines secernere a se non potest ... Cum igitur ei praecipitur ut se ipsam cognoscat, non se tamquam sibi detracta sit quaerat, sed id quod sibi addidit detrahat*” (transl. by McKenna, 53).

VI. Knowing Oneself and Knowing that One Does not Know in the ‘De Trinitate’

The mind, for Augustine, is self-reflective: “When the mind [...] knows itself [...] it is itself both the object known and the one that knows”⁴¹. While Augustine presents a preliminary worry that something that is both knower and known cannot be fully known, insofar as the active, knowing part seemingly cannot simultaneously view itself as an object⁴², he thinks that, in fact, the mind does know itself with “absolute certainty”⁴³. This self-reflection is an advantage, not a hindrance. As he puts it: “[...] the mind knows nothing so well as that which is present to itself, and nothing is more present to the mind than it is to itself.”⁴⁴

This presence is a constant one, for he says that “there never was a time [...] when it did not know itself”⁴⁵. He reiterates this basic claim by saying that “when the mind seeks to know itself, it already knows that it is a mind”⁴⁶. This self-knowledge is definitional as well. According to Augustine, when the mind “hears the command ‘Know Thyself’ [...] if it knows what both [words] mean, then it also knows itself”⁴⁷.

Given all of this, it is obvious that Augustine holds the self to be self-evident. It is known automatically and constantly; it is something that one always knows, and it is known by virtue of the knowledge of its terms. Furthermore, it is that thing that is best known by the self. But what exactly is involved in this self-knowing? He gives us two clues. First, he says that what the mind knows, “it knows as a whole”⁴⁸. Expanding on this claim, he talks about how “when the mind knows itself as a whole [...] [it] [...] knows itself perfectly”⁴⁹. Thus, for him, self-knowledge is constant and perfect for us; we cannot help having it, and we have it wholly.

But since Augustine also admits that we are ignorant (of God, of some sensible things, etc.), how can we really know ourselves in a complete way? If knowl-

⁴¹ Ibid., IX, c. 12, n. 18, 309,31–33: “*Itaque mens cum se ipsa cognoscit ... cognitum enim et cognitor ipsa est*” (transl. by McKenna, 39).

⁴² Cf. *ibid.*, IX, c. 3, n. 3, 296 (transl. by McKenna, 27). Augustine uses the analogy of sight, and how one knows others’ eyes but does not know one’s own, except with a mirror.

⁴³ Ibid., XIV, c. 4, n. 7, 429,37–41: “*Nil enim tam nouit mens quam id quod sibi praesto est, nec menti magis quidquam praesto est quam ipsa sibi. Et alia quantum satis uisum est adhibuimus documenta quibus hoc certissime probaretur*” (transl. by McKenna, 143).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., X, c. 8, n. 11, 325,24–25: “*Ita uidebit quod numquam se non amauerit, numquam nescierit*” (transl. by McKenna, 53).

⁴⁶ Ibid., X, c. 4, n. 6, 319,4–6: “*Postremo cum se nosse mens quaerit, mentem se esse iam nouit*” (transl. by McKenna, 48).

⁴⁷ Ibid., X, c. 9, n. 12, 325,3–6: “*Ipsam enim quod audit: Cognosce te ipsam [...]. Si autem utrumque nouit, nouit et se ipsam*” (transl. by McKenna, 53 sq.).

⁴⁸ Ibid., X, c. 3, n. 6, 318,48–49: “*Quod scit tota scit*” (transl. by McKenna, 48).

⁴⁹ Ibid., IX, c. 4, n. 7, 299,71–72: “*Mens uero cum se totam nouit, hoc est perfecte nouit*” (transl. by McKenna, 30).

edge of the self requires us to know ourselves wholly, and one aspect of ourselves is our ignorance, then it follows that in order to know ourselves, we need to know that we do not know. This is a peculiarly human condition, since Augustine's God knows himself fully as well, but as an omniscient being, he cannot know that he does not know. Basically, for Augustine, a human has to know that she does not know, and perhaps even what she does not know, in order to have self-knowledge in the proper sense.

Augustine's answer to many of these puzzles is expressed somewhat paradoxically, but the point behind the words is clear: for him, everyone is susceptible to the negative, non-assenting error of being unaware that one knows something, and hence not assenting to it. Here is how he puts it:

"[...] with regard to something of which we have not thought for a long time, and of which we are unable to think except when it is brought to our attention ... we do not know that we know<;> [...] one who reminds another may rightly say [...]: 'You know this, but you do not know that you know it?'"⁵⁰

Augustine's purpose, then, is to prove to us that we know something we do not realize we know: namely that we know ourselves, and thus that we know that (qua imperfect epistemic beings) we do not know. We have already seen why he thinks we know ourselves, so now we will look at why he thinks we can know that we do not know.

The first thing Augustine does is to establish that knowledge admits of degrees. Though full knowledge of something is knowledge in the proper sense (or "wholly", as he puts it), partial knowledge is possible as well. As he says, "the more a thing is known, but not fully known, the more the mind desires to know the rest"⁵¹. And unsurprisingly, he similarly holds that full ignorance implies not knowing at all, and that it is a spot from which one cannot ever recover.

"unless some slight knowledge of a doctrine were impressed on our mind, we would in no way be enkindled with the desire of learning it [...] no one can in any way love something of which he is absolutely ignorant."⁵²

Since we all know ourselves, as he showed above, and we desire to know ourselves, it must follow that we do in fact have partial knowledge. So what does this partial knowledge amount to? For Augustine, it is first required that one knows what knowing is. As he puts it: "unless he knows what it is to know,

⁵⁰ Ibid., XIV, c. 7, n. 9, 434,24–28: "*Sed unde diu non cogitauerimus et unde cogitare nisi commoniti non ualemus, id nos nescio quo eodemque miro modo si potest dici scire nescimus. Denique recte ab eo qui commemorat ei quem commemorat dicitur: 'Scis hoc sed scire te nescis'*" (transl. by McKenna, 147).

⁵¹ Ibid., X, c. 1, n. 2, 312,41–43: "*Quo igitur amplius notum est sed non plene notum est, eo cupit animus de illo nosse quod reliquum est*" (transl. by McKenna, 43).

⁵² Ibid., X, c. 1, n. 1, 311,16–312,30: "*tamen nisi breuiter impressam cuiusque doctrinae haberemus in animo notionem, nullo ad eam descendam studio flagraremus [...]. Nam quod quisque prorsus ignorat amare nullo pacto potest*" (transl. by McKenna, 42).

no one would be able to say with confidence, either that he does know, or that he does not know.”⁵³

Second, he mentions at least two ways in which we can know that we do not know in this partial way. One way involves a vague understanding of a thing, without knowing it in specific detail:

“No studious or curious person ... loves the unknown ... for he ... already knows generically what he loves, and is now eager to know it in some particular thing or things which he does not know ... He therefore frames in his mind an imaginary picture by which he may be aroused to love.”⁵⁴

And the other way deals with doubt: “if one doubts, one knows that one does not know”⁵⁵, and furthermore, such doubt is epistemically advantageous. For as Augustine explains it, “when we doubt [...] although we do not know whether the thing is true about which we doubt, yet we know that we doubt”⁵⁶. The doubting error of the skeptic in ‘Contra Academicos’ thus contains its own unassailable truth: while doubting implies that we do not know the thing about which we have doubt, we can still have knowledge that we doubt.

In short, our doubting is a fact about ourselves that we have to be aware of if we are to be responsible epistemic agents. If we do not know this, we do not know ourselves. But since we do know ourselves, it of course follows that we know our own ignorance in some cases. It is not that we know we know nothing, in the mode of the Socrates of the ‘Apology’. Instead, it is that we know we do not know everything.

So how do we understand self-knowledge for Augustine, then? The basic claims are that:

(a) we know ourselves fully

and

(b) we do not know everything

There are a number of possible moves he might make.

(1) Restrict (a) to the next life, and (b) to this life. This has the virtue of resolving the apparent contradiction completely. But if this is really his view, why would he emphasize (a) repeatedly, without making reference to the

⁵³ Ibid., X, c. 1, n. 3, 315,124–126: “*Quod nisi haberet cognitum, neque scire se quidquam posset fidenter dicere neque nescire*” (transl. by McKenna, 45).

⁵⁴ Ibid., X, c. 2, n. 4, 315,1–316,6: “*Quilibet igitur studiosus, quilibet curiosus non amat incognita etiam cum ardentissimo appetitu instat scire quod nescit. Aut enim iam genere notum habet quod amat idque nosse expetit etiam in aliqua singula vel in singulis rebus quae illi nondum notae forte laudantur, fingitque animo imaginariam formam qua excitetur in amore*” (transl. by McKenna, 45 sq.).

⁵⁵ Ibid., X, c. 10, n. 14, 328,42: “*si dubitat, scit se nescire*” (transl. by McKenna, 56).

⁵⁶ Ibid., XV, c. 15, n. 24, 497,7–10: “*Cum autem dubitamus nondum est uerbum de re de qua dubitamus, sed de ipsa dubitatione uerbum est. Quamuis enim non nouerimus an uerum sit unde dubitamus, tamen dubitare nos nouimus*” (transl. by McKenna, 196).

restriction to the next life, as he did when discussing how we can know the Trinity or God's nature generally in other parts of the 'De Trinitate'?

- (2) Reject one of the two claims. But since he repeatedly makes each claim, it is unlikely that we can do this and remain faithful to his own views.
- (3) Make a distinction among objects of knowledge. For instance, he might claim that even when talking about this life, we know our internal selves fully – that is, our seemings, our intellectual capacities, etc. – without knowing the external world fully. Thus, to know ourselves is to know what is truly us – our souls, their contents, and their powers – and nothing else, which harkens back to Socrates's own emphasis on the knowledge of one's soul in the first 'Alcibiades'. It does not matter whether my body has an injured finger, and it also does not matter whether I even realize my body has this injury, since knowledge of the way the external world matches my mental content is, if not impossible, at least difficult to attain. In short, we restrict error only to the domain of the sensory world – this is where the skeptics are correct to insist on the avoidance of positive error – and yet still hold that it would be erroneous to (negatively) refuse to admit that we can know ourselves in the internal sense. This interpretation is also consistent with his 'Contra Academicos' account of external world skepticism, where he claims (in response to skeptical doubts about the existence of an external world) that "the world" simply is what seems⁵⁷. That is, he suggests an idealist response to skeptical objections. The problem with this interpretation is that, throughout his corpus, he expresses doubt even about internal things – especially about the nature of the soul and its powers. If he has doubts there, then at best one would have the capacity to know oneself (in the internal sense) fully, but not necessarily have a fully actualized internal knowledge of oneself.
- (4) Similarly, we might restrict the objects of knowledge even further: we know our immediate mental goings-on with certainty, but this does not automatically apply to our memory of past goings-on, or to the external world, the Trinity, etc. In short, we could reduce ourselves to the level of a Humean bundle of perceptions, epistemically speaking. This seems to be too restrictive, however, since Augustine wants to admit the knowledge of mathematical and logical truths, among other things.

In my view, the first two possibilities are too far removed from Augustine's words, and thus cannot be the correct interpretations, even if they are both philosophically appealing and theoretically simple. The fourth possibility too is intriguing, but making Augustine into a proto-Hume is too much. Thus, despite its problems, the third interpretation – that self-knowledge is internal, not external – makes the most sense of what Augustine actually says.

⁵⁷ For further discussion of this topic cf. C. Bolyard, Augustine, Epicurus, and External World Skepticism, in: *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 44/2 (2006), 157–168.

VII. Conclusion

To sum up, then, for Augustine, one's status as a human requires that one have knowledge of mathematical truths (e.g., that $3 \times 3 = 9$), as well as of introspective truths (e.g., that one lives). But since there are some things that one knows one does not know perfectly (God's nature, the external world, etc.), one has doubts, and for Augustine, the fact that one has such doubts is itself a known truth. Positive error, to harken back to the discussion in the 'Contra Academicos', is a central aspect of what we stumble into as humans, but that fact itself is not a reason for despair; rather, it is one of the truths most readily available to us, and it is central to our knowing of ourselves. Our knowledge is limited, but our self-knowledge is not; ignorance is not transitive in this way, according to Augustine. Just as it is true that an omniscient being would not have to know everything that every other individual knows (e.g., God could not know Augustine's knowledge of himself 'from the inside', as it were), so too one could have full knowledge about oneself without similarly requiring that this full knowledge be of oneself as fully knowledgeable of everything.

So, ultimately, Augustine holds, Socrates is right to exhort us to know ourselves, which (for Augustine) means being reminded that one knows more than one realizes. Socrates-qua-academic-skeptic, if taken to believe truly that he knows nothing, was not sufficiently reminded. But if Socrates is akin to the academicians discussed in the 'Contra Academicos' in this way, then he is being disingenuous when he claims such ignorance. Though he may well be ignorant of some things, which is his natural state as a human, he knows other things, including himself. As a result, for Augustine, Socrates is either a liar (if he had hidden, deeply held knowledge claims) or Socrates is epistemically irresponsible (if he did not assent to any such claims), insofar as he takes positive error to be the only sort, and disavows negative error as something of equal importance.

Augustine seems to conclude that a lying Socrates is vastly preferable to an epistemically irresponsible one. As with the God of Augustinian Illumination – that is, Augustine's "Inner Teacher", to use his phrase –, someone who does not tell us everything in life can still be worth our respect. In this, I think, he does not err.

When Is It Wrong? Models of Argument and Interpretation from the 12th to the 13th Century¹

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This brief examination of some 12th and 13th c. thinkers grappling with and redefining the nature of error in light of Aristotle's definition of science is part of a larger project in which I am attempting to understand how ideas about systematized knowledge in the disciplines, both secular and sacred, changed with the advent of the full Aristotelian corpus in the late 12th and early 13th centuries. I want to consider the sense in which this is a moment when a new epistemological pattern, that of Aristotelian science, challenges the existing one developed out of Augustine's 'De doctrina christiana' and enshrined in 12th-century schools and monasteries. It is a kind of truism that the desire to avoid error and doubt, achieved by grounding knowledge in certain, indubitable foundations, is a modern not a medieval project. Like most truisms, this one has something to it, but my claim is that the shape of this dialectic of certainty and avoidance of doubt and error has a predecessor in the medieval reception of Aristotle's notion of science from the 'Posterior Analytics'.

My working hypothesis is two-fold. First, I argue that these models contain two different notions of error and how to avoid or remedy it; one is the product of a model of knowledge as interpretation in which error is essentially relative and a matter of degree, and in which answers are not so much wrong as incomplete, products of an earlier stage of understanding from which one progresses toward more complete understanding. The other, not Aristotle's actual view, but what early interpreters thought he seemed to propose, is a harsher and more unforgiving notion of error, one that is in a more complete binary opposition with getting things right. The 'Posterior Analytics' introduces an ideal of science and scientific certainty that the earliest adopters worried pushed large portions of accepted truth into the realm of uncertainty and liability to error. I explore

¹ I wish express my gratitude to the Thomas-Institut in Cologne for its support of research which started on a DAAD research grant with the support of Professor Albert Zimmermann many years ago and is the foundation for some of the claims of this paper. Though I have only recently returned to this topic with new perspectives, Prof. Zimmermann and the wonderful library of the Thomas-Institut gave me a tremendous start on this interesting period. I was especially grateful to be able to be able to present some of this work in Cologne at the invitation of the present director, Professor Andreas Speer, who served as Professor Zimmermann's assistant when I was in Cologne.

these notions of error as expressed in the 12th century in the work of Hugh of St. Victor, and then trace the attempt to reconstruct notions of error in light of Aristotle's 'Posterior Analytics' in a sampling of early responses to Aristotle's model of science in Robert Grosseteste, Roger Bacon, William of Auvergne, and the 'Summa fratris alexandri'. Second, I will look at three major thinkers in the next wave of interpretation and assimilation of Aristotle on science: Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure. These thinkers, I argue, find ways to reduce the opposition between these two models of knowledge, finding within the Aristotelian picture a place for this earlier hermeneutic notion of truth and error.

I. Hugh of St. Victor: The Hermeneutics of Error

Augustine's 'De doctrina christiana' attempts to describe and assimilate the liberal arts into Christian education by finding them a place in the project of interpretation of scripture, understanding signs as they point to things. This means, of course, understanding human languages, linguistic signs, through grammar and logic, but, further, the way in which the 'things' named in scripture are themselves signs pointing to God. In this account, error becomes a matter of a failure to interpret signs correctly or of the taking of signs for things². Hugh of St. Victor relatively easily adapts this model in his 'Didascalicon'. Like Augustine, Hugh understands the acquisition of knowledge as following a curriculum of reading, and translates reading into a moral project. Thus not only is Christian education described literally as a course of reading, but its stages also follow the stages of reading, from an inadequate grasp of things because of an ignorance of signs, to the understanding of things via signs, to the reinterpretation of things as signs pointing beyond themselves. Hugh's well-known emphasis on beginning from the 'literal level' in scripture (and logic in secular study) has as a corollary a stronger sense of error: that without it, one goes wrong at first and in a complete sense. Logic, by which Hugh means the arts of language, must precede the other disciplines, Hugh explains, because without an understanding of words and concepts "no treatise of philosophy can rationally be explained"³. So also in the study of Scripture, the student must be humble enough to begin with the literal level, with the meaning of the words, before proceeding to the spiritual level, that is, to an understanding of the things named

² For this way of understanding 'De doctrina' and Hugh of St. Victor as following in his footsteps, cf. E. C. Sweeney, Hugh of St. Victor, *The Augustinian Tradition of Sacred and Secular Reading Revised*, in: *Reading and Wisdom: The De doctrina christiana of Augustine in the Middle Ages* (ed. E. English), Notre Dame—London 1995, 61–83.

³ Cf. Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, I, 11, ed. J.-P. Migne, in: *Patrologia latina*, vol. 176, Paris 1854, 749D.

in scripture⁴. Without these foundations, Hugh says, we will be as lost as if we had never learned the alphabet.

But on closer examination, Hugh's account outlines a more complex picture of error and its remedy. Hugh argues that logic must come first because without it we will assume that real things conform in a direct way to language and to our ways of reasoning⁵. In parallel fashion, he notes that one of the results of a careful study of the literal sense is a realization that not every line of Scripture can be read literally⁶. But, of course, knowledge of the literal level alone will not tell us when the literal meaning is insupportable; rather it is faith, the grasp of the meaning as a whole, that tells us when a literal meaning is misleading⁷. The relationship between the literal and figurative meanings, like that between parts and the whole of the text, is dialectical or circular, each confirming and adjusting the other. The same structure is found in the relationship of the secular disciplines of the trivium (the study of words) and physics (the study of things). Just as one cannot without other criteria determine when the literal sense is false, so one cannot without some knowledge of things determine when the structure of language is not mirrored in reality. Thus, Hugh argues that there is a kind of innate knowledge of things through the "ideas of reason", which are the reflection in the human mind of the divine ideas⁸. The nature of error and its overcoming on this model follows the dialectic of reading. One is not so much 'wrong' at a foundational level from which there is no path back to the truth when mistaken about the literal level (or logic and language) than at an earlier place in the dialectic of reading, and thus has an incomplete rather than utterly erroneous grasp of the truth.

This same view is expressed in a slightly different way in Hugh's insistence that the most important of the requirements for learning is humility, which Hugh understands in academic terms as openness to all learning and to learning from others. No book is without some merit, he maintains, and what one does not perfectly understand may not be a reflection of falsity but rather of our own limitations⁹. This account, then, formulated by Augustine and carried forward in Hugh of St. Victor, puts forward a view of knowledge in which truth and error are not so much 'either-or' options as matters of degree, in which everything is

⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, VI, 3, 799D.

⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, I, 11, 749B.

⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, VI, 3, 801B.

⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, VI, 4, 801B–C.

⁸ Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, Appendix C, in: C. Buttner (ed.), *Hugonis de Sancto Victore Didascalicon de studio legendi: A critical text*, (DC) 1929, 134–135. According to Buttner, this appendix on the three subsistencies of things, in the divine mind, the human mind and the material world, appears in some classes of manuscripts as a preface to the whole 'Didascalicon' (*ibid.*, xvi and xxxi). J. Taylor argues that it might belong in the 'Didascalicon', in book I after chapter 6, which is the discussion of "the three manners of things" (J. Taylor [ed. and transl.], *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor*, New York 1961, 152).

⁹ Cf. Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, III, 13, ed. Migne (nt. 3), 774B.

understood to have a kind of truth, and in which the pursuit of knowledge is envisioned as a path of deepening knowledge and the grasp of truth as ever incomplete and partial.

II. Grosseteste and Bacon: Conflicts between New and Old Models of Knowledge

1. *Grosseteste*

In contrast to openness toward all books as sources of knowledge and the model of assimilating them by finding them a place in the catalog of the arts and sciences in Hugh, Aristotle's requirements for science – necessary and certain premises drawn from indubitable first principles (gleaned from sense experience) combined to reach conclusions that are themselves necessary and certain – seem to create a two-tiered system of knowledge, those meeting the scientific standard of certainty and those falling into error. Questions arise about physics/natural philosophy, mathematics, and metaphysics, concerning their methods, principles, and evidence. Aristotelian science seemed to threaten the carefully constructed analogy between secular and sacred study, in which the path to knowledge is a path of reading, a path of spiraling progress from less complete to more complete knowledge in the Augustinian/Victorine model.

Robert Grosseteste's early and important commentary on the 'Posterior Analytics' approaches these problems by arguing that the term *scientia* is applicable to all the practical and speculative sciences in an analogical sense¹⁰. Science may be said *communiter* of the knowledge of purely "erratic" events; it is said *proprie* of the knowledge gained from a study of the natural world where causal connections hold either necessarily or "for the most part" (*frequentibus*); it is said "more properly" (*magis proprie*) of those things that always happen in the same way; science applies to mathematics in this more proper sense since knowledge of both its principles and its conclusions is equally necessary and equally knowable¹¹. Finally, *scientia* applies "most properly" (*maxime proprie*) to knowledge of what is immutable when it is known through its cause, which is immutable in

¹⁰ The translation used by Robert Grosseteste was made by James of Venice sometime after 1159. Grosseteste makes references to other translations and seems also to have consulted the translation from the Arabic made by Gerard of Cremona, who also translated Themistius's paraphrase of the text. On the dating of Grosseteste's commentary to the later 1220s; cf. J. McEvoy, *The Philosophy of Robert Grosseteste*, Oxford 1982, 512 sqq. and A. C. Crombie, *Robert Grosseteste and the Origins of Experimental Science 1100–1700*, Oxford 1953, 46 sq.

¹¹ Robert Grosseteste, *Commentarius in Posteriorum analyticorum libros*, I, 2, ed. P. Rossi, Florence 1981, 99. Grosseteste's commentary is cited here and below by the book and chapter number he is commenting on in Aristotle's text and the page number in Rossi's edition.

its being and causing¹². On this scale, metaphysics is the most knowable, mathematics next, and physics the least certain of the speculative sciences. The degree of certainty and avoidance of error for the various sciences is based on the degree of immutability of the science's object of study; the more immutable, the more certain the science.

But Grosseteste's analysis of how the disciplines line up on the scales of certainty, doubt, and error does not stop with the scale produced by the stability and intelligibility of their objects. The objects of mathematics are spontaneously (*sponte*) available to our intellects while those of logic and metaphysics, by contrast, are so removed from sense knowledge that we are frequently deceived about their nature; likewise, in natural science the objects are mutable so that we are less certain about them¹³. Hence, logic and metaphysics are called 'rational' or 'probable' rather than 'scientific' knowledge because of the distance of their objects from our knowing powers; physics, on the other hand, is called so because of the distance of its objects from the source of intelligibility¹⁴. Things more divine, more abstract and distant from matter would be more knowable to the unfallen human mind, unclouded by phantasms, Grosseteste explains, but to those weighed down by the corruption of the body and affection for corporeal things, mathematical objects are the "most certain" since in their comprehension we are aided by phantasms¹⁵. Thus, even though scientific in an extended sense, error creeps in physics and metaphysics both, though for opposite reasons.

This fit between our minds and mathematical objects leads to methods or degrees of success with similar methods. In mathematics, Grosseteste claims, it is easier to reduce what is known to its principles because we know that the middle term belongs essentially to the subject. In the other sciences, there are a variety of middle terms that may or may not lead to a conclusion that is the most probable. In such cases, we are obliged to consider all the possible middle terms in order to find the best one¹⁶. Thus, while the other sciences must

¹² Cf. *ibid.* The fourth and most proper definition does not add anything to the third definition in terms of the things or events known; both are immutable. But it adds a condition about the way they are known, i. e., through their causes. Hence, the fourth level differentiates between knowledge of principles and conclusions; principles are not known through demonstration but are the starting points for demonstration. Knowledge of conclusions, on the other hand, is science strictly speaking since it is knowledge of what is necessary and knowledge through the cause (cf. Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, I, 2, 71a 9–13).

¹³ Cf. Robert Grosseteste, *Comm. Post. Anal.*, I, 11, ed. Rossi (nt. 11), 179.

¹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*: "*Et has tres, scilicet logicam, metaphysicam et naturalem, vocat Aristoteles rationales, quia propter parvitatem certitudinis comprehensionis istarum quodammodo versatur in his rationaliter magis et probabiliter quam scientificae, licet in his sit scientia et demonstratio, sed non maxime dicta. In solis enim mathematicis est scientia et demonstratio maxime et principaliter dicta.*"

¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, I, 17, 257. While reliance on sense images or phantasms is less productive of knowledge for the mind before the fall and the need to rely on sensation is a punishment for sin, fallen human nature is more able to know that which can be known through sensation than that which is immaterial.

¹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, I, 11, 182sq.

sometimes use induction, Grosseteste points out, mathematics always uses deduction¹⁷. Grosseteste argues that what is peculiar to scientific knowledge (as opposed to intellectual knowledge) is that what we come to know scientifically is always what we first doubted or what appeared false to us. (This is because science, unlike *intellectus*, is *acquired* knowledge, so in science we move from not knowing to knowing¹⁸.) Grosseteste, then, introduces the notion of doubt as a positive feature of scientific knowledge: the domain of science is the realm of what we do not know and can raise questions about. We can connect this to Grosseteste's fledgling notion of the necessity of 'testing' scientific hypotheses. Grosseteste describes a process of experiment (*experientia*) in which "the awakened reason begins to wonder and to consider whether things really are as the notion in the memory says, and these two lead the reason to an experiment (*experientia*)"¹⁹. Grosseteste begins by disagreeing with Aristotle's opening claim (in the Latin version Grosseteste consulted) that all knowledge comes from pre-existing knowledge. Grosseteste comments, "I say that knowledge of principles is not acquired by instruction since we are not taught nor do we add to our knowledge unless that which we first conceive is either doubtful to us or apparently false, and after doubting or holding the contrary opinion the truth becomes manifest to us"²⁰. Here, Grosseteste sees doubt and even error as a fruitful beginning of scientific investigation. Error is to be overcome, of course, but by posing the questions, beginning the investigation, rather than following the path of reading, beginning from a stance of humility and faith as recommended by Hugh of St. Victor.

2. Roger Bacon

Roger Bacon has the most extreme response to Aristotelian science as he understood it and he is also the one most concerned about finding in the new

¹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 178 sq.

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 94.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 14, 215: "*Et ex hac intentione estimate frequenter et in memoria expurgiscitur ratio, que expurgata incipit admirari et considerare an res se habeat sicut dicit estimatio memorata. Et hec duo convertunt rationem ad experientiam [...]*"; transl. by S. P. Marrone, William of Auvergne and Robert Grosseteste: *New Ideas of Truth in the Early Thirteenth Century*, Princeton (NJ) 1983, 274.

²⁰ Robert Grosseteste, *Comm. Post. Anal.*, I, 1, ed. Rossi (nt. 11), 94: "*Et dico quod scientia principiorum non est acquisita per doctrinam, quia non docemur vel addiscimus nisi illud quod cum primo concipimus est nobis dubium vel apparet falsum et post dubitationem vel contrariam opinionem manifestatur nobis eius veritas.*" Southern cites the Latin translation of Aristotle Grosseteste is commenting on as, "*omnis scientia acquisita per doctrinam et disciplina [...] est ex pre-existente cognitione*", which is a bit different than the Greek text in modern use, which reads, "all teaching and all learning by argument comes from preexistent knowledge". Cf. Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, I, 1, 71a 1–3. Cf. also R. Southern, *Robert Grosseteste: The Growth of an English Mind in Medieval Europe*, Oxford: 1986, ²1992, 164. Nonetheless, Grosseteste's insertion of the importance of knowledge beginning in doubt is significant.

scientific model a path out of error. Bacon's 'Opus maius' enumerates four causes of error. These are: 1) submission to faulty authority, 2) the influence of custom, 3) popular prejudice, and 4) the desire to conceal ignorance and appear wise. The first three amount to different ways of describing prevailing opinion or consensus as unreliable, and the fourth speaks to the human desire to be an authority or an arbiter of opinion. Bacon also adds a strong dose of esotericism, rejecting any sense that truth can be contained in popular opinion or will come out in the marketplace of ideas. Bacon's path of avoiding or correcting error by avoiding both authorities and opinion contrasts with the Victorine model once again, since for Hugh the path to knowledge is constructed by taking in and learning from all books, all sources of knowledge, working from the assumption that they have some early or partial version of the truth to offer. Bacon, more than others in this period, takes the position that what has come before is error, because it does not meet the high standard of demonstrative knowledge.

The way to avoid error, Bacon explains, is to "replace weak authorities with strong, custom with reason, and the feelings of the vulgar with the opinions of the holy or wise"²¹. In order to avoid these errors and find our way to true authorities, reason, and the wise, we must, Bacon argues, "freely hear what is contrary to vulgar convention"²². The point seems to be to examine received opinion critically, to take the opposite side of a question from that which is accepted by common opinion. One must, in other words, cultivate skepticism about what is usually thought. Truth is usually on the side of what is unpopular, Bacon warns, so one can make a practice of skepticism about what the masses think as a way of avoiding error more effectively. It is hard not to hear in these criticisms of authority, tradition, and common sense echoes (or rather the opposite of echoes, a kind of preparatory throat clearing) of that *other* Bacon, Francis, and his critique of the "idols of the mind"²³.

Roger Bacon concludes that only mathematics can be free from doubt and only mathematics can proceed by demonstration²⁴. Therefore, the way to "arrive at certainty without doubt and truth without error" is to ground all the other

²¹ Roger Bacon, *Opus maius*, I, 8, ed. J. H. Bridges, Oxford 1897 [Reprint: Frankfurt a. M. 1964], 17: "*Remedium vero contra haec tria non est, nisi ut tota virtute auctores validos fragilibus, consuetudini rationem, sensibus vulgi sententias sanctorum aut sapientum reponamus.*" Hereafter references are made in the text as 'Opus maius', followed by the part, chapter, and page number in Bridges's edition. Translations are my own but I have consulted the translation of R. B. Burke, *The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon*, Philadelphia 1928. (The Latin edition is not up to contemporary standards, so my conclusions about Bacon can only be conditional. Though the English translation is not egregiously misleading, in the English version, some pieces of the text are found in different locations than in the Latin version; the manuscript tradition presented a difficult set of conflicts even when these were originally published, more or less one hundred years ago.)

²² Roger Bacon, *Opus maius*, I, 8, ed. Bridges (nt. 21), 17: "*Et licet totus mundus sit his causis erroris occupatus, tamen audiamus libenter contraria consuetudini vulgatae.*"

²³ Francis Bacon, *Novum organon*, lib. I, aphorisms 38–68, edd. G. Rees/M. Wakely, in: *The Instauratio magna part II: Novum organum and Associated Texts*, Oxford 2004, 79–108.

²⁴ Cf. Roger Bacon, *Opus maius*, IV, dist. 1, c. 2, ed. Bridges (nt. 21), 105.

sciences in mathematics²⁵. “A science which is full of doubts and sprinkled with opinions and obscurities cannot be rendered certain, nor made manifest, nor verified except by some other science known and verified, certain and plain to us”, Bacon writes, and that other science can only be mathematics²⁶.

As a way of avoiding error in physics (even a mathematical physics), Bacon gives *experimentum* a new, more important task. After demonstrative proof has been constructed, Bacon maintains that those results must be confirmed by *experimentum*. While Aristotle describes the path of the discovery of the *principles* of science by a kind of induction in the famous metaphor of soldiers after a rout returning to form a line at the end of the ‘Posterior Analytics’, Bacon notes the necessity of *experimentum* to confirm conclusions in the sciences²⁷. Knowledge by means of reasoning to conclusions via argument is not enough to produce certainty, Bacon argues; the removal of doubt requires the discovery of conclusions by the path of experience as well²⁸. The path out of error to certainty goes through experimental science; only by this path can trickery and magic be distinguished from art and nature, Bacon argues²⁹.

III. Sacred vs. secular error in William of Auvergne and Alexander of Hales

1. *William of Auvergne*

While Bacon boldly tries to turn the new science into an aid and support for theology, William of Auvergne and the ‘Summa fratris Alexandri’ respond differently to the move by Grosseteste, Bacon, and others to privilege the new science as certain and downgrade other kinds of knowledge as fraught with error. William and ‘Alexander’ want to protect sacred study from the charge that it lacks rigor and certainty, even as in subtle ways they allow the language and categories of Aristotelian science to reconfigure sacred study.

²⁵ Ibid., 106. Cf. *ibid.*, c. 1, 97 sq.

²⁶ Ibid., 107.

²⁷ Cf. Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, II, 19, 100a 1–14; Bacon, *Opus maius*, VI, ed. Bridges (nt. 21), 172 sq.

²⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 167. The precise role of experience here is not clear. Bacon gives the example of someone who has never seen a fire: with only the idea or notion of fire, he would not know enough to avoid being burned. He also argues that one needs actual, drawn lines to understand Euclid’s geometry. On the role of experience here, cf. J. Hackett, *Roger Bacon on Scientia Experimentalis*, in: *id.* (ed.), *Roger Bacon and the Sciences: Commemorative Essays* (*Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters* 57), Leiden–New York–Köln 1997, 291.

²⁹ Cf. Roger Bacon, *Opus maius*, VI, ed. Bridges (nt. 21), 172 and 221. On Bacon and magic, cf. L. Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science: During the First Thirteen Centuries of Our Era*, 2 vols., New York 1929, vol. 2, 666 and G. Molland, *Roger Bacon and the Hermetic Tradition in Medieval Science*, in: *Vivarium* 31 (1993), 140–160.

William sets out to defend the universal truth (*veritatem commune*) by means of “irrefragable proofs” and writes of his aim to use Aristotle to produce “demonstrative certitude, after which you are left without any trace of doubt”³⁰. Thus, in ‘De universo’, William rejects arguments from authority and instead sets out to use philosophical arguments to refute error and establish the truth and produce certainty.

This “natural knowledge”, the knowledge of the philosophers, is strongly contrasted with the stance of faith. The question raised by this contrast is what the value of rational, demonstrative arguments to support the claims of faith is. William takes up this question in ‘De fide’, in which he argues that belief sustained by rational proof is less virtuous than belief as a commitment to what is not known with certainty, nor supported by evidence making it probable. He concludes: “Believing, however, that which is not apparently true [...] is virtue.”³¹ And the faith that is a virtue in this sense is characterized as the foundation of religion, belief that is a free and vehement choice based on the virtue of believing alone³². William concludes that the sort of belief that stands in need of support or security is not only not true faith but is an insult to God³³. Thus, in William, as opposed to Hugh, there is no longer an analogous structure between the arts and the study of scripture; one, demonstrative science, is certain and error free, while faith is a commitment to what is not known with certainty.

Though William vehemently rejects the quest for scientific certitude in matters of faith, he holds that its fundamental principles, the “articles of faith”, are the “first principles” of sacred study, which must be accepted by everyone and held with certainty. Though these principles of faith are not supported by their self-evidence to the intellect but by vehement voluntary commitment, assent to them must be universal and unequivocal. What began sounding, at least to modern ears, like faith as an embrace of what is not just uncertain but improbable, ends in a kind of fundamentalism in the etymological sense. That is, it ends in the sense that there must be a foundation, a basic and clear set of beliefs that must simply be accepted as necessary truth without further discussion. But as “unscientific” as this kind of foundation for faith sounds, it is a reaction exactly to the criterion of science as proceeding from indubitable first principles. The point here is not that William takes the basic claims of creed as

³⁰ William of Auvergne, *De universo*, IIIa-IIae, Part III of Part II, ch. 6, ed. F. Hotot, in: *Guillelmi Alverni Eipscoopi Parisiensis Opera Omnia*, 2 vols., Orleans – Paris 1674 [Reprint: Frankfurt a. M. 1963], vol. 1, 1028E; id., *De anima*, ch. 1, pt. 1, ed. F. Hotot, in: *ibid.*, vol. 2, suppl., 65b. All passages from William of Auvergne’s works are cited from this edition by the original divisions in the text and volume and page numbers from this edition. These particular passages from ‘De universo’ and ‘De anima’ are also cited in R. J. Teske, *William of Auvergne on the Relation between Reason and Faith*, in: id., *Studies in the Philosophy of William of Auvergne*, Bishop of Paris (1228–1249), Milwaukee 2006, 179–194, at 186.

³¹ William of Auvergne, *De Fide*, ed. Hotot (nt. 30), vol. 1, 4F: “*Credere autem ea quae non apparent esse vera, vel quae non videntur esse vera, hoc non est nisi virtutis.*”

³² Cf. *ibid.*

³³ Cf. *ibid.*, 5C.

beyond doubt and error-free (or that that is something new) but that he formulates that indubitable and universal character in terms that mirror the structure of Aristotelian science as principles from which further conclusions can be drawn. And he thereby creates a clear line between certainty (in the vehement voluntary acceptance of the principles) and error (in rejecting or not holding the principles as certain). Here, we see articulated in the realm of faith that sharp line between complete and undoubting adherence versus anything less, which counts as error.

2. *The Summa fratris Alexandri*

The writers of the ‘Summa fratris Alexandri’ carry forward what we have found in William: the notion of two different kinds of certainty (and, as corollary, two different kinds of error), which they distinguish as intellectual vs. affective. The discussion of these matters in the ‘Summa’ is aimed at laying out the sense in which sacred study can be understood as “science”, and these differences become the foundation for arguing for its own kind of certainty different from that of Aristotelian science. Theology perfects the affections rather than the intellect and is truly wisdom (*sapientia*), because it is cognition according to taste (*sapor*) and, second, issues in action, moving the affections toward the good “through the principles of fear and love”³⁴. Third, faith precedes understanding in theology, but in science understanding precedes faith or assent³⁵. Conceding that science has greater *intellectual* certitude, the writers answer that the certitude of theology is *affective*, that of the sciences *experiential*. The ‘spiritual man’, unlike the ‘animal man’, derives understanding and certitude from the spiritual meaning of scripture³⁶. There is the certitude “according to the speculation of the intellect, which is through the mode of vision”, but there is another affective certitude “which is through the mode of adherence, namely through the will or love”³⁷.

Thus, there are two kinds of error, one in the intellect and one in the affect or will. In a sense, this disjunction goes back to Augustine; that is what is depicted so dramatically in Augustine’s ‘Confessions’. Augustine, after having achieved a kind of intellectual conversion, having reasoned through and come

³⁴ Summa fratris Alexandri, q. 1, c. 1, corp., ed. P. Peratoni, in: Doctor irrefragabilis Alexandri de Hales Ordinis minorum Summa theologica, 5 vols., Quarrachi 1948, vol. 4, 2: “*Prima est ut cognitio secundum visum, et ideo debet dici scientia absoluta; secunda, ut cognitio secundum gustum, et ideo debet dici sapientia a sapore affectionis.*” References are given below by the original divisions in the text followed by the page number in this edition.

³⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, ad 4, 3.

³⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, c. 4, a. 2, ad 3, 9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, q. 2, M. 3, c. 4, ad 3, 35: “*Distinguendum est: quod est certitudo secundum speculationem intellectus, quae est per modum visus, et est certitudo secundum sensum affectus, quae est per modum adhaerentiae, voluntatis scilicet vel amoris.*”

to the conclusion that the Christian account of God and reality is the one that makes the most sense, Augustine is unable to bring his will to assent, to give up his love for those lesser and less real objects. However, in another sense, we could say this is a very un-Augustinian position, since Augustine, like Plato, considers that an error of the affect is an error of the intellect; that is, to go wrong in what one loves (or in Plato's language, what is considered good) is to go wrong about what is true: the true nature of the good. The 'Summa fratris alexandri' writers, like William of Auvergne, certainly take the view that error about matters of faith, affective error about what one loves, is far worse than intellectual error. In that sense, they stand with Augustine and Plato over modern thinkers like Hobbes and Hume, for whom there is no error in the affects, no disputing, if you will, not only about taste but also love and desire, making reason "the slave of the passions", as Hume so famously put it. We are still far from this modern view in the 'Summa fratris alexandri', but we have taken a step toward it.

IV. Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure

1. *Albert the Great*

Albert the Great develops a number of strategies to adapt Aristotle's account of science so that it can fit all the disciplines, including physics, metaphysics, and revealed theology. We do find in Albert some of the same ways of ranking the sciences in terms of their certainty and propensity to error that we found in Grosseteste and Bacon. In the 'Commentary on the Metaphysics', Albert defines wisdom as knowing that which is difficult to know; and things are difficult to know either through their imperfection (physics) or their perfection (metaphysics)³⁸. In a discussion of which of the sciences are the most free, Albert argues that it is neither physics (because of greater error and diverse opinions) nor divine science (because it is beyond our intellects); thus, math is the most liberal or free because its conclusions are not subject to variety of opinion and are proportioned to our intellect³⁹.

Yet, Albert argues that, as sciences, all these disciplines are concerned with unchanging *rationes* rather than changeable individuals, and, second, that different disciplines have different methods and forms depending on the knowability of their different objects. For Albert, this also means that ethics can be a

³⁸ Cf. Albertus Magnus, *Metaphysica.*, I, tr. 2, cap. 1, ed. B. Geyer, in: *Alberti Magni Opera Omnia* (editio Coloniensis), vol. XVI/1, Münster 2000, 18.

³⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, cap. 7, 24,38–67. Cf. B. Ashley, *St. Albert and the Nature of Natural Science*, in: J. A. Weisheipl (ed.), *Albertus Magnus and the Sciences: Commemorative Essays 1980*, Toronto 1980, 95. Ashley claims, wrongly I think, that Albert completely rejects the Platonist view that math is more a science than physics.

science, insofar as it is concerned not with individual acts *per se* but *rationes morum*⁴⁰. Albert's 'Commentary on the Physics' begins with a distinction between the path of knowing in physics as different from that of the other sciences. The context is Aristotle's claim in the first chapter of the 'Physics' that that which is first known to us is universals or wholes, known confusedly, thus, Aristotle notes, children begin by calling all women 'mother' and only later come to distinguish among individuals. Albert uses this comment to make a distinction between physics and the other sciences. Physics begins with the senses and thus begins with the confused universal and works its way toward more distinct knowledge⁴¹. This mode of knowing, from that which is simpler and indistinct to what is more distinct and composite, is the *via compositionis* and is proper to natural science but not to the other sciences. In those other sciences, the opposite path, from the particular to the universal, the *via resolutionis*, is followed⁴². This view of physics is reflected in Albert's commentaries on Aristotle's works of natural philosophy, which include Albert's insertions of alphabetical lists of types of stone, herbs, animals, along with descriptions of them, their properties and possible uses or virtues.

In addition, experience/experiment is more necessary in physics than in mathematics, Albert argues. Knowledge of things in matter and time is mixed with opinion and not confirmed science, Albert notes, citing Aristotle's comment about how the young can become good mathematicians but not physicists or ethicists, because they do not have experience⁴³. But Albert goes further, arguing that it is the uncertainty of the subject matter of physics, that what is known about things in matter and motion is more mixed with opinion and more uncertain, that makes us *more* in need of experience/experiments in physics than in mathematics in order to avoid error⁴⁴. Albert makes a similar claim in his

⁴⁰ Cf. J. Müller, Ethics as a Practical Science in Albert the Great's Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics, in: W. Senner e.a. (eds.), Albertus Magnus Zum Gedenken nach 800 Jahren: Neue Zugänge, Aspekte und Perspektiven (Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte des Dominikanerordens, N.F. 10), Berlin 2001, 277–279. Honnenfelder concurs with Wieland's claim that Albert initiates an establishment of ethics as self-standing practical philosophy; cf. L. Honnenfelder, Die philosophiegeschichtliche Bedeutung Alberts des Grossen, in: id./R. Wood/M. Dreyer/M.-A. Aris (eds.), Albertus Magnus und die Anfänge der Aristoteles-Rezeption im lateinischen Mittelalter (Subsidia Albertina 1), Münster 2005, 249–280, at 271 and G. Wieland, Ethica – Scientia practica. Die Anfänge der philosophischen Ethik im 13. Jahrhundert (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters. N. F. 21), Münster 1981.

⁴¹ Cf. Albertus Magnus, Physica, I, tr. 1, cap. 6, ed. P. Hossfeld, in: Alberti Magni Opera Omnia (editio Coloniensis), vol. IV/1, Münster 1987, 12. "And so it is clear how the universal is more known to sense according to us and more hidden by nature, and the particular more manifest by nature and more hidden to sense according to us." Cf. Albertus Magnus, Metaphysica, I, tr. 1, cap. 7, ed. Geyer (nt. 38), 10, which makes same distinction between two kinds of universals, confused and mixed vs. separate and distinct.

⁴² Albertus Magnus, Physica, I, tr. 1, cap. 6, ed. Hossfeld (nt. 41), 12. Cf. id., Metaphysica, I, tr. 1, cap. 7, ed. Geyer (nt. 38), 10.

⁴³ Cf. Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, IV, 1142a 11.

⁴⁴ Cf. Albertus Magnus, Metaphysica, I, tr. 1, c. 1, ed. Geyer (nt. 38), 1,24–27 and 52–56. Cf. M. de Asúa, Minerals, Plants and Animals from A to Z: The Inventory of the Natural World in

‘Commentary on Metaphysics’, arguing that we need more often and more diligently to test/experience those things that are less certain⁴⁵.

In his account of the principles of metaphysics, Albert notes that they cannot be demonstrated or taught but that one must be persuaded to their truth, justifying a broader use of language and tactics to bring about understanding of its basic principles⁴⁶. Albert also defends the use of poetic language and other persuasive techniques in revealed theology, beginning from the feature theology shares with metaphysics – that, as Aristotle says, our eyes confronted with the highest things are like those of bats looking toward the sun⁴⁷. Besides poetic language, Albert goes on defend the use of admonition and command, appeals to the senses through hymns or prayers, parables or similitudes as appropriate to theology.

What I am suggesting – though I have only as yet scattered and incomplete evidence for this claim – is a possible way of seeing as coherent the things Albert says about the different sciences – his strong emphasis on observation and collections of data natural philosophy, his reliance on intellectual illumination in metaphysics, and his leanings toward a highly negative, even mystical theology. Albert accommodates diverse sciences understood by different traditions by construing the science, their methods, and sources as different from one another, conforming to their subjects and human powers of knowing. From within this frame of the diversity of scientific knowledge in its origins and procedures, we can also make sense of Albert’s opposition to mathematical physics, as well as his broader understanding of the nature, modes, and functions of revealed theology.

It would follow from this view that Albert understands error (and its avoidance) to take different forms in different disciplines. Physics needs examples and data to avoid error because of the variability in its subject matter; metaphysics, because its considerations are not tied up with matter, needs intellectual illumination rather than experience to avoid error, and theology, because of the degree to which its object surpasses our intellect and because what it illuminates is the supreme good, needs different modes of language and genres to adumbrate its unknowable object and move the affections toward it to avoid error.

Further, we can see that in Albert there is a more thorough and nuanced assimilation of Aristotle than in Grosseteste or Bacon. Looking more broadly than at the ‘Posterior Analytics’, Albert finds in Aristotle a notion that we can

Albert the Great’s *philosophia naturalis*, in: Senner e.a. (eds.), *Albertus Magnus Zum Gedenken nach 800 Jahren* (nt. 40), 399. Cf. also T. Koehler, *Wissenschaftliche Annäherung an das Individuelle im 13. Jahrhundert. Der Einfluss von ‘De animalibus’ des Aristoteles*, in: J. A. Aertsen/A. Speer, *Individuum und Individualität im Mittelalter* (*Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 24) Berlin – New York 1996, 161 – 177.

⁴⁵ Cf. *Albertus Magnus, Metaphysica*, I, tr. 1, cap. 8, ed. Geyer (nt. 38), 11 sq.

⁴⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, cap. 3, 20,40 – 49.

⁴⁷ Cf. *id.*, *Summa theologiae*, tr. 1, q. 5, cap. 1, in: ed. D. Siedler, in: *Alberti Magni Opera Omnia* (editio Coloniensis), vol. XXXIV/1, Münster 1978, 16 sq.

move from general and indistinct knowledge to more specific and clearer knowledge. Albert has a sense, quite correctly, that error (like children calling all women ‘mother’) is not an abyss from which one can never extricate oneself or which one can wholly avoid, but rather a mode of ‘partial’ knowing from which, necessarily, more complete knowing must come.

Thus, Albert has in his ecumenism a way of being more open and more flexible about error, preserving the notion of multiple ways of knowing, multiple sources of knowledge, and multiple methods to pursue understanding. Thus, there is not one method, one source of knowledge, one way of knowing while the others amount to error, as they do for Bacon, for example, who rejects all knowledge except mathematic demonstration.

2. *Thomas Aquinas*

Thomas Aquinas adopts an even more thoroughgoing account of the sciences as constituted by their *rationes* rather than the ontological status of their objects than Albert or the earlier Grosseteste. Aquinas’ strong and consistent account of the subjects of the sciences is grounded on the mode of their consideration of things, their *ratio*, rather than the ontological status of their objects. Though this understanding of the sciences differentiates them in terms that are neither arbitrary nor unjustified, it still generates sciences that study diverse things under the same aspect, and/or the same things under different aspects. There is a science of everything insofar as it is being, and a science of material being considered without matter, and a science, i.e., necessary knowledge, of that which is not *per se* necessary, the natural world.

In his ‘Commentary on the Posterior Analytics’, Aquinas articulates the general principle for differentiating one science from another:

“Since something scientifically knowable is the proper object of a science, the sciences will not be diversified according to material diversity of scientifically knowable objects, but according to their formal diversity [...]. Therefore, no matter how diverse certain scientifically knowable objects may be in their nature, so long as they are known through the same principles, they pertain to one science, because they will not differ precisely as scientifically knowable. For they are scientifically knowable in virtue of their own principles.”⁴⁸

Different secular sciences sometimes work toward the same conclusion, but they do so through different means (e.g., the earth can be proved to be round by both mathematical and physical principles); he concludes:

“Hence, nothing prohibits the same things which are treated by the philosophical disciplines according as they are knowable by the light of natural reason, also being

⁴⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Expositio libri Posteriorum Analyticorum*, I, 41, edd. R. Spiazzi/A. Pirotta in: *S. Thomae Aquinatis In Aristotelis libros Peri hermencias et Posteriorum Analyticorum expositio*, Turin – Rome 1955, 366.

treated by another science according as they are known by the light of divine revelation.”⁴⁹ “Since therefore sacred scripture considers things according as they are divinely revealed. [...] all things whatever which have been divinely revealed share in the single formal *ratio* of the object of this science. And thus they are comprehended under sacred doctrine as under one science.”⁵⁰

On the one hand, and like Albert, Aquinas sees the sciences as arranged hierarchically; the *ratio* of the metaphysician is both more universal and seeks knowledge of more universal causes than those of mathematics and physics. Further, from these human sciences to sacred doctrine there is a qualitative jump in the interpretation of the significance and end of the reality it considers. However, on the other hand, there is a sense in which which any *ratio* can trump the other, depending on what question you are asking. The different sciences can only be perspectives, so to speak, because we cannot take in all aspects of things at once; we cannot consider the thing as material and in motion, as quantified, as being, and as created at once, but have to move from one kind of consideration to another. In the ‘Summa’, on the issue of whether we can understand many things at the same time, Aquinas responds, “the intellect can, indeed, understand many things *as one* but not *as many*”⁵¹. As Aquinas notes in his Sentences commentary, the metaphysician’s consideration is more universal than the physicist’s or the mathematician’s only because it ignores other essential and accidental characteristics of the thing; it considers the thing as being and hence not as material in motion, or morally good or bad⁵². Each science is both a way of seeing many things at once (as physics, for example, considers many things as sharing the common traits of motion and matter), and, in a sense, a way of seeing one thing at a time, i. e., what the things considered share. Each of the sciences is a true consideration of things, a perspective that is not false; it is, however, limited by its *ratio*.

The result does not just explain how you can have certain knowledge of what is *per se* uncertain but also how you can have multiple sciences each with their own claim to the status of knowledge as different perspectives on the same objects. Their claims, though different, do not have to compete and do not have

⁴⁹ Id., *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 1, a. 1, ad 2, ed. Commissio Leonina, in: *Thomae Aquinatis doctoris angelici Opera omnia*, vol. IV, Rome 1888, 7: “*Unde nihil prohibet de eisdem rebus, de quibus philosophicae disciplinae tractant secundum quod sunt cognoscibilia lumine naturalis rationis, et aliam scientiam tractare secundum quod cognoscuntur lumine divinae revelationis.*”

⁵⁰ Ibid., a. 3, corp., 12: “*Quia igitur sacra Scriptura considerat aliqua secundum quod sunt divinitus revelata, secundum quod dictum est, omnia quaecumque sunt divinitus revelabilia, communicant in una ratione formali obiecti huius scientiae. Et ideo comprehenduntur sub sacra doctrina sicut sub scientia una.*”

⁵¹ Ibid., I q. 85, a. 4, corp.: “[...] *intellectus quidem potest multa intelligere per modum unius, non autem multa per modum multorum [...]*” (my emphasis).

⁵² Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super Sententiis, Prooemium, Prol.*, q. 1, a. 2, corp., ed. R. P. Mandonnet, vol. 1, Paris 1929, 10: “*Ita et cum ista scientia [sacra doctrina] sit altissima et per ipsum lumen inspirationis divinae efficaciam habens, ipsa unica manens, non multiplicata, diversarum rerum considerationem habet, non tantum in communi, sicut metaphysica, quae considerat omnia in quantum sunt entia, non descendens ad propriam cognitionem moralium, vel naturalium.*”

to falsify those of the other sciences to succeed. For Aquinas, this is tied to the limited and always partial mode of human understanding, which can come to universal knowledge only by sacrificing particularity. We can, as Aquinas puts it, know many things at once but not as many, only, then, under one *ratio* at a time. This multi-layered notion of knowledge and error is carried through in the way in which Aquinas executes the *disputatio* format, most characteristically not engaging in falsification so much as reinterpretation, reinstating even rejected views as part of the truth.

Though I cannot really argue for this here, my view is that, superficial appearances to the contrary, the “*disputatio*” method actually envisions error more as an interpretive error, as incomplete understanding that can be brought right, rather than as something that is simply and wholly wrong. Disputation is connected to the methods of scripture interpretation, bringing to bear texts in the arts, and then of answering questions/solving disputes about how to interpret the text, figuring out which readings can be accommodated and at what level.

3. *Bonaventure*

Even though there is a sense in which Albert and Aquinas are in different ways recuperating a sense of knowledge as interpretation and of error as partial or incomplete knowledge, it is Bonaventure who recovers more completely these Augustinian/Victorine notions in the context of assimilating Aristotle’s notion of science. Bonaventure’s ‘De reductione atrium ad theologiam’ uses Hugh’s division of the mechanical arts and division of philosophical knowledge into rational (the trivium), natural (divided into physics, mathematics, and metaphysics), and moral (divided into ethics, economics, and politics). Echoing ‘De doctrina’ and the ‘Didascalicon’, Bonaventure insists that the different arts and sciences are ordered toward an understanding of scripture⁵³. Bonaventure finds (repeatedly and relentlessly) in the arts and sciences their “reduction” to scripture, to God and, in the ‘Collationes in Hexaëmeron’, more specifically to Christ. The modifications of light which are the modes of knowing other than in scripture (sense perception, mechanical arts, rational, natural, and moral philosophy) are not just to be used in the understanding of scripture but they are, Bonaventure writes, “enclosed within it and perfected in it ... and by means of it are ordered to eternal illumination”⁵⁴. In the ‘Collationes’, Bonaventure expounds on the three ways the intelligence is led to the light: through reasoning, experience/experiment, and the understanding. Experience/testing brings knowledge of the mixed, composite, and defective character of the product in relation to

⁵³ Cf. Bonaventure, *De reductione artium ad theologiam*, 7, ed. Collegium S. Bonaventurae, in: *Doctoris seraphici S. Bonaventurae Opera omnia*, vol. 5, Quaracchi 1891, 363–385, at 322.

⁵⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

its origin in God⁵⁵. What Bonaventure says in the ‘De reductione’ about natural philosophy is, for him, of course, true of all of the sciences: “Behold, how the wisdom of God is hidden in natural philosophy.”⁵⁶

When it comes to metaphysics, Bonaventure outlines what it can know, how it can exemplify the Trinitarian structure with Christ at the center, and what it cannot achieve on its own. Metaphysics can move from created and particular being to uncreated and universal being and can see this being as origin and end, Bonaventure maintains. It is Christ as center who produces knowledge and who is “the metaphysical center that leads us back”. Bonaventure concludes, “this is the total of our metaphysics: emanation, exemplarity, and consummation, namely to be illuminated by spiritual rays and reduced to the highest. And this is true metaphysics”⁵⁷. For Aristotle, substances, composites of matter and form, are subsistent, their forms un-generated and, thus, in a sense necessary, while accidents of those substances are contingent, non-necessary features dependent on their host substances. Bonaventure glosses the primary distinction between subsistence and contingency (an opposition evoking the Aristotelian distinctions between substance and accident and necessary and contingent) in Trinitarian form: the subsistent is “from itself, according to itself and on account of itself” and contingent being is then “from another, according to another and on account of another”⁵⁸. For Bonaventure, contingency implies dependency not just on any efficient cause but on an exemplar; it also implies direction – the desire to return to that origin.

For Bonaventure, Aristotle’s six pairs of metaphysical terms – substance/accident, universal/particular, potency/act, one/many, simple/composite, and cause/caused – are versions of Augustine’s distinction between signs and things. As Augustine’s analysis leads to the conclusion that God is the only thing and everything else is a sign, Bonaventure’s reveals God as the one in and exceeding the many. God is simple, even the immaterial angels are composite.

Bonaventure’s point in both ‘De reductione’ and the ‘Collationes’ is the same, in a sense, as Plato’s in the *Gorgias* – that knowledge (or science or wisdom) is not knowledge unless it is knowledge of the good. Knowledge of the world is not really knowledge unless it leads to knowledge of God, Bonaventure shows, repeatedly finding Trinitarian structure, emanation and return, dependence and direction in the creature. Bonaventure does not create two realms, one of scientific knowledge and the other of affective certainty, as if they could be rivals or separate but equal; rather, he subsumes Aristotelian science into theology, rewriting its terms so that they find their true home in God or scripture or Christ. Aristotelian science looks into the reality, incomplete and dependent though it

⁵⁵ Cf. id., *Collationes in Hexaëmeron*, V, 30, ed. Collegium S. Bonaventurae, in: *ibid.*, 327–454, at 359.

⁵⁶ Id., *De reductione artium ad theologiam*, 22 (nt. 53), 325.

⁵⁷ Id., *Bonaventure, Collationes in Hexaëmeron*, I, 17 (nt. 55), 332.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 12, 331.

is, in the material world, but the theologian finds in its definitions, distinctions, and arguments pointers back to their origin and end in God. In Bonaventure's hands, the very form of the Aristotelian syllogism, the means of showing scientific conclusions, becomes a figure for the Trinity. "The middle term by its evidence, manifestation and fittingness with the extremes compels reason to assent, so that while the extremes before had no manifest connection between them, by virtue of the middle term's connection to both extremes, their connection became manifest."⁵⁹ Hence, for Bonaventure, what the syllogism reveals most deeply, its truth, if you will, is not in uncovering relations of cause and effect, based on definitions and essential attributes, but its structure as imitating the truth of Christ as mediator, joining Father to Holy Spirit, human beings to God.

Thus, Bonaventure is not so much contradicting or proposing an alternative to Aristotelian science as he is asserting an origin and end for all knowledge/science (Aristotelian or not) in Christ. In other words, Bonaventure does not reject Aristotelian science as outright or total error but sees it as partial truth, at its best exemplifying, as all things do, a divine origin and end. Insofar as Bonaventure rejects the conclusions Aristotle reaches about the eternity of the world or the reality of divine ideas, he rejects them for cutting off the possibility of further meaning, as a failure to see the deeper reality of things in terms of their origin and direction in God. For Bonaventure, then, the nature of error is as a form of mis- or non-interpretation, harkening back, of course, to Augustine's 'De Doctrina christiana'. The error is not in Aristotle *per se* but in the context in which his account is placed, as the whole truth as a rival to the Christian truth, rather than as Bonaventure would see it, as the partial truth.

V. Conclusion

I have always been attracted to Hugh of St. Victor's interpretative model of knowledge acquisition and open-ended stance toward its sources, and interested in the question about how much of it survived into the 13th century and beyond. This question is not usually posed because the terms for discussing knowledge, truth, and error become those from the Aristotelian corpus, leaving scholars of one period or the other on their own side of that divide. But there are common questions and problems albeit phrased in different terminology. In the early wave of interpreters, Grosseteste, Bacon, William of Auvergne, and the 'Summa fratris alexandri', we see what appeared to be the challenges posed by Aristotle for Hugh's hermeneutic mode. What I have tentatively argued for here is that in the hands of Albert, Aquinas, and Bonaventure some aspects of the picture we find in Hugh of St. Victor are reinterpreted in the context of Aristotle's

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 25, 333.

account of science, making possible, in different ways and different degrees, the co-existence of multiple modes of knowing and methods of coming to truth and avoiding error. Though it is a big claim to make, I think we do find in that this flexibility and openness (albeit within limits and with continued battles about how flexible and open to be) that allowed for the development of the sciences, in its own way paving the way for modernity and, ironically, the defeat of scholasticism, which helped to bring it about.

In terms of the notion of error such a view implies, the philosophical task is less about refutation and the purging of error than finding a place for it in the ongoing dialectic of understanding. I think that such a view of error, in which it is recast as partial truth, goes with a notion in which its opposite, truth, is also partial and provisional. On such a view our certainties are not so brittle that they cannot admit qualifications and completions by others. That goes as well, I hope, for the claims I make in this paper.

L'erreur invincible et le problème sceptique à la fin du Moyen Âge

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Je souhaiterais ici attirer l'attention sur un fait mineur, mais significatif, à savoir l'importation par Gauthier Chatton d'un concept d'éthique et de théologie morale, le concept d'erreur invincible (*error invincibilis*), d'une erreur qui ne peut pas être évitée, dans les discussions épistémologiques sur le scepticisme (entendu comme débat sur la possibilité pour nous de parvenir à une connaissance certaine de la vérité). Cet usage par Chatton de la notion d'erreur invincible dans un contexte épistémologique est, pour autant que je sache, relativement isolé¹. Mais il est néanmoins important dans la mesure où il est lié aux discussions qui conduisent à l'élaboration de l'argument sceptique le plus puissant, l'argument de la tromperie divine². Les échanges entre théologie morale et épistémologie conduisent à la formation d'une nouvelle forme de fidéisme, directement liée à l'erreur invincible. Classiquement, en particulier dans la tradition augustinienne qui est la plus sensible au défi sceptique (par exemple, chez Jean de Salisbury ou des franciscains théologiens comme Bonaventure ou Matthieu d'Acquasparta), les arguments sceptiques sont utilisés pour montrer les limites de la connaissance naturelle, et en particulier, de la connaissance rationnelle³. C'est

¹ On trouve un usage épistémologique ponctuel chez Jean Buridan également mais dans un contexte un peu différent. Il n'est malheureusement pas possible d'aborder ce point dans le cadre de cette étude. Voir Jean Buridan, *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam* (ultima lectura), Paris, Poncelet le Preux, 1518, L. II, q. 1, fol. 9ra; *Quaestiones super decem libros ethicorum*, Paris, Poncelet le Preux, 1513, I, 1, fol. 11va: «*Sciendum quod veritas secundum quod de ea loquimur hoc est conformitas nostre cognitionis autem etiam nostri sermonis ad rem et hec veritas est perfectio ac bonum naturali intellectus ut dicitur in sexto huius. Propter quod intellectus noster deficit semper a complemento sue perfectionis quam diu fuerit opinionibus falsis informatus. Et tamen non est propter hoc imaginandum quod falsitas sit peccatum nobis imputabile. Non est enim culpa nostra sed est nostre nature debilitas si ignorantia fuerit inuincibilis. Constat autem quod plures veritatis amatores et ipsius profundi scrutatores incurrunt sepe falsas opiniones sed inuincibiliter propter debilitatem sui intellectus. Sed tunc mendaces essemus et in culpa si falsum aliquid preferemus aut sustineremus scienter.*»

² Sur cet argument, l'étude classique reste celle de T. Gregory, *Dio ingannatore e genio maligno*. Nota in margine alle *Meditationes* di Descartes, *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana* 53 (1974), 477–516, et T. Gregory, *La tromperie divine*, dans: Z. Kaluza/P. Vignaux (eds.), *Preuves et raisons logiques à l'université de Paris. Logique, ontologie et théologie au XIV^e siècle*, Paris 1984, 187–195; cf. aussi D. Perler, *Zweifel und Gewissheit. Skeptische Debatten im Mittelalter*, Frankfurt a. M. 2006, 266–280.

³ Pour une présentation générale de cette question, cf. Ch. Grellard, *Comment peut-on se fier à l'expérience? Esquisse d'une typologie des réponses médiévales au scepticisme*, dans: *Quaestio*, 4 (2004), 113–135; Ch. Grellard, *Academicus*, dans: I. Atucha/D. Calma/C. König-Pralong/I. Zavattero (eds.), *Mots médiévaux offerts à Ruedi Imbach, Turnhout 2011*, 5–16. Sur Jean

précisément cet échec de la raison qui permet de faire une place à la foi dans l'accès à la vérité. Avec la notion d'erreur invincible, la situation est un peu différente. Le concept d'erreur invincible a d'abord été élaboré dans le cadre de la théologie morale afin de rendre compte de la possibilité d'excuser ou non certains types de faute. Transposé dans le contexte épistémologique, il renvoie à une situation de contingence radicale où l'exclusion de l'erreur ne peut jamais être garantie. Cette incertitude maximale, exemplifiée par la tromperie divine, laisse le sujet cognitif seul, et sans moyens d'identifier ou de rectifier son erreur. Cette nouvelle situation modifie radicalement la réponse que l'on peut offrir au problème sceptique, et modifie le problème lui-même. Je rappellerai d'abord les étapes de la formation du concept d'erreur invincible dans le contexte de la théologie morale, puis j'examinerai successivement les usages épistémologiques de la notion d'erreur invincible chez Gauthier Chatton et Robert Holcot.

I. L'erreur invincible: une question de théologie morale

Le concept éthique d'ignorance invincible (plutôt que d'erreur, je reviendrai sur ce point) émerge dans le contexte des morales de l'intention dans l'école de Laon et dans la philosophie de Pierre Abélard, dans le second quart du 12^{ème} siècle. La première présentation détaillée du concept peut être lue dans l'*Éthica sive scito teipsum* d'Abélard⁴. Ce dernier l'utilise dans la discussion sur la responsabilité morale des juifs qui ont persécuté le Christ et les premiers martyrs. S'ils ont à bon droit ignoré la nature divine du Christ, ils n'ont pas péché en le persécutant. Plus encore, ils auraient péché s'ils ne l'avaient pas persécuté puisque leur propre compréhension de la loi divine (en l'occurrence, une mauvaise compréhension de la loi divine, selon Abélard) les obligeait à persécuter le Christ:

«Sunt autem qui bonam vel rectam intencionem esse arbitrantur, quocienscumque se aliquis bene agere credit et deo id placere, quod facit, sicut etiam illi qui martires persequebantur, de quibus veritas in euangelio: Venit hora ut omnis qui interficit nos arbitretur obsequium se prestare deo. (...).

de Salisbury, cf. Ch. Grellard, Jean de Salisbury et la renaissance médiévale du scepticisme, Paris 2013. Sur Bonaventure, cf. A. Speer, Certitude and Wisdom in Bonaventure and Henry of Ghent, dans: G. Guldentops/C. Steel (eds.), Henry of Ghent and the Transformation of Scholastic Thought, Leuven 2003, 75–100.

⁴ Sur ce concept peu étudié à ce jour, cf. O. Lottin, Le problème de l'ignorantia iuris de Gratien à Saint Thomas d'Aquin, dans: Psychologie et morale aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles, vol. 3, Louvain – Gembloux 1949, 56–62; S. Kuttner, Kanonistische Schuldlehre von Gratian bis auf di Dekretalen Gregors IX, Vatican 1935, 147–162; Ch. Grellard, Que m'est-il permis d'ignorer? La foi, l'ignorance et les limites acceptables de l'orthodoxie, dans: Ch. Grellard/Ph. Hoffman/L. Lavaud (eds.), Genèses antiques et médiévales de la foi, Paris, Etudes augustiniennes (à paraître); J. W. J. Laemers, Invincible ignorance and the discovery of the Americas: history of an idea from Scotus to Suarez, Ph Dissertation, University of Iowa, 2011.

Non possumus dicere eos in hoc peccasse nec ignoranciam cuiusquam ue ipsam eciam infidelitatem cum qua nemo saluari potest, peccatum esse.»⁵

Dans ce cas, l'ignorance, accompagnée d'une intention droite et de la volonté constante d'accomplir ce que Dieu semble commander, pourrait être une excuse pour le péché⁶. Mais au-delà de cette approche théologique de la notion d'ignorance invincible, Abélard présente aussi un point de vue plus général, à portée épistémologique, avec le cas du chasseur homicide:

«Non credere uero Christum, quod infidelitatis est, quomodo paruulis uel his, quibus non est annunciatum, culpe debeat ascribi, non uideo, uel quicquid per ignoranciam inuincibilem fit, cui scilicet prouidere non ualimus, ueluti si quis forte hominem, quem non uidet, in silua sagitta interficiat, dum feris uel auibus sagittandis intendit.»⁷

Supposons qu'un chasseur, en forêt, en dépit de toutes les précautions qu'il a prises (il n'a pas été négligent mais examiné avec précaution son environnement, et pris soin de ne viser que les bêtes sauvages qu'il chassait) en vient à tirer une flèche qui ne tue pas la bête qu'il visait mais un homme qui se promenait là (et qu'il a pris pour une bête). Ce type d'accident de chasse renvoie à une situation où les efforts cognitifs n'ont pas été couronnés de succès dans l'identification de l'objet perçu, malgré toute la bonne volonté que l'on y a mis. Peut-on pour autant excuser le chasseur de son acte? L'exemple est intéressant car il identifie clairement les causes de l'excuse: le chasseur a fait de son mieux, n'a pas été négligent, mais ne se trouve pas en situation de percevoir pleinement sa victime, en raison des limites de ses facultés cognitives. Même si Abélard utilise ici la notion d'ignorance, on se trouve clairement dans une situation d'erreur, causée par l'ignorance: l'ignorance de la présence du promeneur et l'erreur de perception (qui consiste à prendre une chose pour une autre) sont les deux causes principales de l'homicide. L'ignorance de la vérité divine par les juifs et l'ignorance du promeneur par le chasseur sont structurellement similaires: tout ce qui excède les facultés cognitives humaines, soit d'un point de vue structurel (comme la nature divine), soit d'un point de vue accidentel (comme la visibilité du promeneur dans une forêt) relève de l'ignorance invincible. Notre ignorance est invincible quand, malgré tous nos efforts, nous ne pouvons atteindre la vérité.

Quelques années plus tard, Jean de Salisbury soulignait la dimension sceptique d'une telle ignorance invincible. Il l'inclut, en effet, dans la liste des multiples facteurs qui limitent la capacité humaine à saisir la vérité avec certitude:

⁵ Pierre Abélard, *Ethica siue scito teipsum*, ed. R. M. Ilgner (Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis 90), Turnhout 2001, 36 sq.

⁶ En fait, Abélard prend soin de distinguer plusieurs sens de *peccatum*, et surtout il introduit une dimension cognitive objective dans son éthique qui interdit d'en rester à ce qui nous semble bon. Je ne peux rentrer ici dans ces détails qui ne sont pas pertinents pour mon propos général. Cf. Grellard, *Que m'est-il permis d'ignorer* (nt. 3).

⁷ Abélard, *Ethica*, ed Ilgner (nt. 4), 44.

«*Sed quia multa sunt quae praepediunt intelligentiam, utpote invincibilis ignorantia eorum, quae ratione expediri non possunt, sicut sunt Sanctae Trinitatis arcana [...] ut ad veri notitiam raro possit accedere.*»⁸

La nature divine, et en particulier sa nature trinitaire, fait partie des objets que notre intelligence limitée ne peut pas pleinement saisir. Notre rapport à la divinité est donc un rapport d'ignorance que seule la foi peut nous permettre de dépasser.

Néanmoins, ce premier usage sceptique de l'ignorance invincible devait rester largement isolé. Le développement effectif de la notion d'ignorance invincible est dû aux juristes (et d'abord aux canonistes), et aux théologiens de la deuxième moitié du 12^{ème} siècle, du maître Roland de Bologne, qui fut élève d'Abélard, jusqu'à Pierre Lombard et Alain de Lille⁹. Dans ce contexte, la notion d'ignorance invincible est principalement utilisée à propos du péché d'Eve: Eve était-elle dans une situation d'ignorance invincible quand elle a suivi les insinuations du serpent? Habituellement, il est admis qu'Eve n'a pas d'excuse puisque son ignorance était vincible et non invincible, et parce qu'elle connaissait les commandements divins. Mais peu à peu, la notion va se trouver appliquer à d'autres cas, comme ceux d'idolâtrie ou d'hétérodoxie (qui sont liés à l'ignorance de la nature exacte de la divinité), en particulier parmi les laïcs et les simples. Dans la 'Summa Aurea', vers 1220, Guillaume d'Auxerre met en place une théorie générale qui sera par la suite largement acceptée (avec quelques variations mineures) par les théologiens du 13^{ème} siècle. De façon intéressante, pour Guillaume, l'erreur est une forme d'ignorance. Il distingue en effet trois sens d'ignorance: par privation, par négation et par disposition. Dans le premier cas, il y a une impossibilité naturelle à savoir, comme dans le cas des enfants et des fous; dans le second cas, l'ignorance est l'absence de science; enfin, dans le troisième cas, l'ignorance est l'erreur, c'est-à-dire le fait de penser à une chose autrement qu'elle n'est:

«*Ignorantia vero dispositionis est qua quis aliter opinatur de re quam sit; et talis quedam est ignorantia iuris, quedam ignorantia facti. Ignorantia facti a toto excusat, adhibita diligentia debita. [...]. Ignorantia vero iuris nenimen excusat.*»¹⁰

Il n'en reste pas moins que le terme utilisé par les théologiens reste celui d'ignorance plutôt que d'erreur. Schématiquement, tous les théologiens acceptent l'idée que l'ignorance invincible excuse de la faute puisqu'elle concerne des situations où il est naturellement impossible de découvrir la vérité. Mais lorsque ce principe général est appliqué à des cas particuliers, la plupart d'entre eux

⁸ Jean de Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, IV, 40, ed. J. B. Hall (Corpus Christianorum. Continuatio Mediaevalis 98), Turnhout 1991, 179 sq. Sur les rapports entre théologie et scepticisme chez Jean de Salisbury, cf. C. Grellard, *John of Salisbury and Theology*, dans: Ch. Grellard/F. Lachaud (eds.), *A Companion to John of Salisbury* (Brill's Companion to the Christian tradition 57), Leiden – Boston 2014, 339 – 373.

⁹ Sur ces développements, cf. Grellard, *Que m'est-il permis d'ignorer?* (nt. 3).

¹⁰ Guillaume d'Auxerre, *Summa Aurea*, II, 16, 4, ed. J. Ribaillier, Paris – Grottaferrata 1982, 560.

cherchent à restreindre le champ d'application de l'excuse de l'ignorance. À titre d'exemple, on peut considérer les trois casus suivants: l'enfant sauvage, le petite vieille hérétique et le diable transfiguré¹¹. Selon le premier casus, un enfant baptisé grandit sans aucun contact avec ses coreligionnaires (soit dans une forêt, soit dans une prison, soit parmi les païens), et donc sans recevoir d'enseignement concernant les dogmes de la foi catholique. Sera-t-il sauvé s'il meurt avant d'avoir obtenu une connaissance explicite des vérités évangéliques? En général, tout le monde admet que, s'il meurt avant d'avoir atteint l'âge de raison, il sera sauvé par le seul sacrement du baptême. Mais s'il meurt après, alors une connaissance explicite de la Révélation est requise. Guillaume d'Auxerre suggère (et il sera suivi par la plupart des théologiens, comme Alexandre de Halés ou Thomas d'Aquin) que si cet enfant fait de son mieux (*facere quod est in se*), il sera aidé par une illumination divine directe par laquelle Dieu lui donnera la foi explicite qui lui fait défaut. La même solution est adoptée dans le second cas: supposons qu'un prêtre ou un évêque enseigne un dogme hérétique à une petite vieille (*vetula*); puisqu'elle doit obéir à son pasteur, elle croira fermement cette erreur comme vraie. Sera-t-elle damnée si elle meurt dans un tel état? Encore une fois, la réponse commune consiste à soutenir que si elle fait de son mieux, elle sera aidée par Dieu afin de connaître la vérité. Et si elle n'est pas illuminée, cela signifie qu'elle ne le méritait pas, soit qu'elle fût négligente, soit qu'elle se trouvât déjà dans un état peccamineux. Finalement, dans le troisième cas, on introduit le problème de l'idolâtrie et de la tromperie démoniaque. Imaginons que le diable prenne la forme du Christ et que quelqu'un l'adore comme étant le Christ. Peut-on dire que cette adoration est méritoire en raison de l'ignorance invincible, ou bien s'agit-il d'un péché d'idolâtrie? Ici, Guillaume d'Auxerre suggère deux solutions différentes qui, encore une fois, seront largement suivies par les autres théologiens. Nous pouvons soit considérer que Dieu aidera quiconque fait de son mieux (comme dans les deux *casus* précédents), soit considérer que l'adoration doit être conditionnelle:

*«Item illa ignorantia est invincibilis, non enim iste simplex potest scire utrum iste sit Christus vel dyabolus [...], sed ignorantia invincibilis a toto excusat [...]. Ad quartum dicimus quod ignorantia illa est invincibilis, quantum in se est, sed vincibilis est quantum ad auxilium Dei, quoniam si iste facit quod est in se, Dominus docebit ipsum. Vel potest dici quod invincibilis est quantum ad discretionem, sed vincibilis quantum ad evasionem, quoniam potest evadere sic: adoro te, si tu es Christus.»*¹²

Il résulte donc de l'analyse de ces trois casus que les théologiens médiévaux privilégient l'argument de l'aide divine (*auxilium dei*) pour résoudre les cas où l'ignorance invincible pourrait excuser l'hétérodoxie, l'erreur en matière de foi.

¹¹ Pour une analyse plus précise de ces casus, cf. Grellard, *Que m'est-il permis d'ignorer?* (nt. 3) et id., *Histoire des philosophies et des théologies de l'occident médiéval. Résumé des conférences 2015–2016*, *Annuaire de l'École pratique des hautes études (EPHE), Section des sciences religieuses* 123 (2016), 239–245.

¹² Guillaume d'Auxerre, *Summa*, III, 26, 5, ed. Ribaillier (nt. 9), 501 sq.

On peut certes y voir, d'un point de vue pastoral, une stratégie argumentative, pour faire reposer l'erreur en matière de foi sur les laïcs eux-mêmes, plutôt que sur leurs pasteurs. Mais on peut aussi y voir le témoignage d'une conviction commune à tout le 13^{ème} siècle, à savoir que Dieu vient en aide à celui qui cherche sincèrement la vérité, quel que soit son objet. La défaillance cognitive éventuelle de l'homme est donc suppléée par un soutien divin d'ordre providentiel.

Un important changement se produit avec Thomas d'Aquin, non pas dans sa théorie de l'ignorance invincible, qui n'est guère originale et dépend largement des développements successifs postérieurs aux théories de Guillaume d'Auxerre, mais dans la manière qu'il a de lier la question de l'ignorance invincible avec le problème de la conscience erronée, et de l'obligation de la conscience erronée. Selon Thomas d'Aquin, il n'est jamais permis de rejeter sa conscience, fût-elle erronée, car elle ne nous indiquerait par que quelque chose est un bien si elle ne le croyait pas effectivement être tel. Dans la mesure où la conscience est le lieu d'instanciation de la loi divine, il y a une obligation à suivre ses injonctions. Néanmoins cela ne signifie pas que la conscience erronée excuse du péché (sauf quand l'erreur est invincible) mais simplement que l'on pécherait davantage en s'y opposant¹³. La position de Thomas ne reçut guère un écho très favorable avant Guillaume d'Ockham. Le *venerabilis inceptor*, paradoxalement, est l'un de ceux qui reprennent et radicalisent la thèse thomasienne de l'obligation de la conscience erronée, et il est probablement le premier à parler systématiquement d'erreur invincible plutôt que d'ignorance. Comme Thomas d'Aquin, il considère que la volonté doit toujours se conformer à la raison, qu'elle soit droite ou erronée. L'erreur invincible est définie comme une erreur qui n'est pas au pouvoir de l'agent, de telle sorte que la volonté peut être excusée puisqu'elle est obligée d'accepter le précepte de la raison¹⁴. La promotion de l'obligation de la conscience erronée va conduire à placer la subjectivité cognitive au cœur de la question de l'erreur.

Au moment où le concept d'erreur invincible va être repris en épistémologie, et pour bien comprendre les ruptures qui se jouent au 14^{ème} siècle, il faut prendre la mesure du bouleversement qu'induit la promotion de l'obligation de la conscience erronée. La valorisation de la conscience individuelle comme lieu d'identification du vrai et du bien et comme lieu d'instanciation de la loi s'accompagne d'une mise à distance de l'aide divine providentielle dans l'accès à la vérité. C'est de cette rupture que l'argument du dieu trompeur est le symptôme.

¹³ Sur cette question, cf. B. Valuet, La conscience erronée selon saint Thomas, dans: *Revue Thomiste* 117 (2017), 5–94.

¹⁴ Cf. Guillaume d'Ockham, *Questiones uariae*, q. 8, edd. G. I. Etzkorn/F. E. Kelley/J. C. Wey, dans: *Guillelmi de Ockham Opera Theologica*, vol. 8, st. Bonaventure (NY) 1984, 429. Sur la conscience erronée chez Ockham, cf. M. Baylor, *Action and Person. Conscience in Late Scholasticism and the Young Luther*, Leiden 1977; T. Shogimen, *Ockham and Political Discourses in Late Middle Ages*, Cambridge 2007.

II. De la théologie morale à l'épistémologie: naissance de la tromperie divine

Le premier usage du concept d'erreur invincible dans une perspective épistémologique se trouve chez Gauthier Chatton (au début des années 1320) dans le contexte de sa discussion de *l'esse apparens* de Pierre d'Auriol¹⁵. Chatton considère la connaissance sensible comme le commencement de toute notre connaissance, et le moyen exclusif, pour nous, de parvenir à saisir le singulier dans le monde extérieur (puisque'il rejette l'idée d'une intuition intellectuelle). Pour cette raison, il est particulièrement sensible à la relation entre l'état mental cognitif et son objet, à la certitude de cette relation. Afin d'en garantir la certitude, il défend une forme de réalisme direct, qu'il oppose au représentationnalisme qu'il attribue à Pierre d'Auriol. Et ce réalisme direct repose sur une théorie causale de la perception selon laquelle l'objet de ma connaissance est la cause de ma connaissance. En effet, puisque'un effet ne peut exister sans sa cause, il suit qu'aucune vision ne peut exister naturellement sans son objet:

«Aut per abstractivam intelligitur talis cognitio per quam non apparet res esse praesens; igitur adhuc sequitur propositum, quia per nullam notitiam quae naturaliter est sine obiecto, apparet res esse praesens. Nam aliter per causas naturales causaretur in nobis error invincibilis per naturam, quia si per naturam causatur actus per quem apparet nobis res esse praesens quae non est praesens, et virtute illius actus mens assentit rei significatae per istam 'A est praesens', igitur mens errat per causationem causarum naturalium; et est error invincibilis, quia nec potest vinci per sensationem aliquam, eo quod idem est argumentum de illa sensatione, nec per intellectum, planum est. Igitur etc.»¹⁶

La thèse est prouvée au moyen d'un argument contrefactuel: si nous admettons la position d'Auriol (telle que Chatton la comprend), c'est-à-dire, si nous admettons qu'une vision peut naturellement être produite sans son objet, nous trouverons dans une situation d'erreur invincible. De fait, par la causalité naturelle, une chose nous apparaîtrait comme présente alors qu'elle n'existe pas, et ni la sensation, ni l'intellect ne nous donneraient les moyens d'identifier l'erreux.

C'est la première occurrence de la notion d'erreur invincible en contexte épistémologique. Cet usage épistémologique a pour fonction de souligner, on le voit, que dans le cadre de l'épistémologie de Pierre d'Auriol, selon Gauthier Chatton, nous ne pouvons pas être conscients des situations où nos perceptions sont erronées, ni ne sommes en mesure, a fortiori, de les corriger. Par consé-

¹⁵ Le débat entre Auriol et Chatton est examiné dans K. Tachau, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham: Optics, Epistemology, and the Foundation of Semantics, 1250–1345* (Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 22), Leiden e. a. 1988. Sur l'épistémologie de Pierre d'Auriol, cf. aussi Ch. Bolyard, *Knowledge, Certainty and Propositions per se notae. A Study of Peter Auriol*, PhD dissertation, Indiana University 1999. Sur Chatton cf. D. Perler, *Zweifel und Gewissheit* (nt. 1), 266–280.

¹⁶ Gauthier Chatton, *Reportatio et Lectura super Sententias: Collatio ad Librum Primum et Prologus*, prol., q. 2, a. 2, ed. J. C. Wey (Studies and Texts 90), Toronto 1989, 91.

quent, si nous voulons préserver la possibilité d'un assentiment véridique, nous devons maintenir un lien causal fort entre la chose extérieure et notre perception. L'importance donnée à la causalité naturelle conduit Chatton à défendre une forme de fiabilisme: habituellement, la causalité naturelle fonctionne correctement, et cette confiance générale dans les relations causales est le fondement de notre connaissance empirique. En d'autres mots, la connaissance est la règle, l'erreur l'exception¹⁷. On pourrait dire, pour Chatton, que le sujet cognitif n'est jamais isolé puisqu'il est engagé dans un réseau de relations causales entre des choses réelles.

Mais une objection se présente immédiatement: si nous introduisons un lien fort entre la chose extérieure et notre perception, c'est-à-dire un lien causal nécessaire, il semble que nous sommes alors conduits à limiter la puissance divine. Si la vision ne peut pas exister sans la chose, Dieu ne pourra pas supprimer l'une sans l'autre, même par sa puissance absolue. Chatton répond en concédant que Dieu, par sa puissance absolue, peut causer une vision sans la chose, ou maintenir une vision après avoir supprimé la chose. En outre, il concède encore qu'aucune certitude empirique ne peut résister à une telle action divine. Dieu pourrait causer dans notre esprit une vision sans objet, laquelle causerait un jugement faux sur la chose. Or, ce cas est structurellement similaire à la critique de l'épistémologie de Pierre d'Auriol. Nous n'avons aucun moyen qui nous permette d'identifier l'action divine, et aucun moyen de corriger la vision erronée, et l'assentiment faux qui en résulte:

«Ad secundum, concedo etiam conclusionem: quod non habemus talem certitudinem quin Deus, qui potest causare visionem sine praesentia rei, posset causare in nobis unum actum quo indicaremus aliter esse in re quam est. Tamen cum hoc stat quod habeamus talem certitudinem quod per causas naturales non possemus sic poni in errore invincibili.»¹⁸

Néanmoins, dans le cas de Pierre d'Auriol, l'erreur invincible est produite naturellement, tandis que dans le cas d'une intervention divine de *potentia absoluta*, il s'agit d'une erreur invincible produite de façon surnaturelle. C'est ce qui permet à Chatton de soutenir que cette situation à laquelle son épistémologie est confrontée est une exception, et, qui plus est, une exception d'ordre purement théorique. L'erreur invincible ne peut se produire que dans une situation exceptionnelle et hypothétique, mais dans notre pratique cognitive quotidienne, nous n'avons pas à prendre en considération une telle hypothèse. De facto, une telle erreur invincible ne se produira pas (même si de *iure*, elle le pourrait), et c'est la principale différence avec Pierre d'Auriol.

Cette réponse est confirmée par les quelques textes où Chatton traite de la tromperie divine. Dans ces textes, Chatton affirme clairement la possibilité théorique de la tromperie divine, mais en même temps, il soutient aussi qu'une telle

¹⁷ Sur le fiabilisme de Chatton, cf. D. Perler, Can we trust our senses? Fourteenth-century debates on sensory illusions, dans: D. G. Denery/K. Ghosh/N. Zeeman (eds.), *Uncertain knowledge. Scepticism, Relativism and Doubt in the Middle Ages (Disputatio 14)*, Turnhout 2014, 63–90.

¹⁸ Gauthier Chatton, Collatio, ed. Wey (nt. 16), 92.

hypothèse n'est pas pratiquement pertinente et doit être exclue. De fait, Dieu peut infuser dans l'esprit une espèce ou n'importe quel état mental, c'est-à-dire, n'importe quelle qualité qui causera un assentiment évident à un état de choses qui n'existe pas. Mais cette action divine *de facto et naturaliter* ne se produit pas:

«*De potentia Dei posses decipi, ita quod Deus potest tibi talia infundere principia quibus evidenter assentires te vidisse Sortem, licet nunquam eum videris. Sed tales non habemus per causas naturales de facto.*»¹⁹

Dans ce texte, Chatton dépend manifestement de Guillaume d'Ockham, dont les Quodlibeta sont contemporains de la 'Reportatio' de Chatton. Mais ce dernier va bien plus loin dans la concession au scepticisme. Il admet, en effet, qu'un ange ou un démon, même s'ils ne peuvent pas causer directement une intuition (au sens d'une perception véridique), peuvent produire une apparence fautive par un mouvement local. Or, aucune certitude empirique ne peut résister à une telle tromperie. Il en résulte que le point de départ de notre connaissance, la certitude empirique, ne peut jamais être tout à fait garantie, et la possibilité d'une tromperie angélique ou divine ne peut jamais absolument être exclue:

«*Dico quod nullam certitudinem habemus per sensum exteriorem quin Deus et angelus et forte etiam aliae causae inferiores aliquae possint nos decipere. Sed tamen communiter non est talis deceptio per causas naturales.*»²⁰

Selon le cours commun de la nature et dans le cadre de la causalité naturelle, il n'y a aucune tromperie ni angélique ni divine. La réponse de Chatton ouvre ainsi la voie aux théories des degrés d'évidence développées explicitement quelques années plus tard par Jean de Rodington et Adam Wodeham²¹. Il n'en reste pas moins que le problème de toutes ces solutions fiabilistes au défi sceptique tient ce que l'on ne peut jamais savoir si l'ordre naturel est rompu, ou non. Gauthier Chatton est probablement le premier à insister aussi fortement sur la radicale faillibilité de notre connaissance du monde contingent, et à souligner que cette connaissance n'est jamais entièrement préservée de l'erreur.

Finalement, l'importation de la notion morale d'erreur invincible dans un contexte épistémologique souligne précisément cette situation: la possibilité d'une tromperie divine rend manifeste les cas où, même en faisant de son mieux, il est non seulement impossible de connaître l'objet perçu mais il est en outre impossible de savoir si l'on est trompé ou non. L'hypothèse de la tromperie divine permet d'introduire un nouveau type d'erreur qui ne peut être corrigé ni par les sens ni par l'intellect. Néanmoins, Chatton s'efforce de circonscrire le

¹⁹ Gauthier Chatton, *Reportatio super Sententias: Libri III–IV*, Lib. III, d. 14, q. 4, a. 3, edd. J. C. Wey/G. J. Etzkorn, vol. 4 (*Studies and Texts* 149), Toronto 2005, 123.

²⁰ Gauthier Chatton, *Reportatio super Sententias: Liber II*, d. 11, q. u, ed. J. C. Wey/G. J. Etzkorn, vol. 3 (*Studies and texts* 148), Toronto 2004, 280.

²¹ Sur Jean de Rodington, cf. M. Tweedale, *John of Rodynton on Knowledge, Science and Theology*, PhD Dissertation, UCLA 1965; sur Wodeham, cf. O. Grassi, *Intuizione e significato*. Adam Wodeham ed il problema della consocenza nel XIV secolo, Jaca, Milano 1986.

champ d'application de cette hypothèse en soutenant qu'elle est purement théorique, et pratiquement insignifiante. Mais dans la mesure où il n'offre aucun argument en faveur de cette restriction, sa position demeure fragile. En outre, contrairement à Jean de Rodington, il ne peut pas désamorcer l'hypothèse au moyen de la bonté divine dans la mesure où, pour lui, les tromperies angélique et démoniaque sont tout aussi dangereuses, et indiscernables, que la tromperie divine. Le seul moyen d'échapper à l'erreur invincible consiste, sur le modèle de la réponse au casus de l'adoration d'une hostie non consacrée, de rendre notre savoir conditionnel: si Dieu ne nous trompe pas, alors nous sommes certains de cette vérité contingente. Mais cette solution peut difficilement satisfaire un sceptique. En dernier recours, la solution repose entièrement sur la confiance que l'on peut placer en Dieu. C'est cette solution que Robert Holcot va reprendre, en la radicalisant, quelques années plus tard.

III. De l'épistémologie à la théologie morale: faire confiance à un dieu trompeur

Une dizaine d'années après Chatton, vers 1333, Robert Holcot franchit une étape supplémentaire dans la généralisation de l'erreur et de l'incertitude en supprimant la restriction théorique à la tromperie divine²². Le but de Holcot est précisément de radicaliser la nécessité de la confiance en Dieu, comme seul moyen d'échapper au scepticisme. Chez lui, le recours à un argument épistémologique est clairement finalisé par une perspective morale, et plus encore, sotériologique. De fait, pour le dominicain, non seulement Dieu peut tromper les créatures, mais de fait, il les trompe, comme l'attestent plusieurs autorités bibliques.

De façon générale, et d'un point de vue épistémologique, n'importe quelle connaissance créée peut-être falsifiée par la mutation de l'objet contingent sur lequel elle porte. Ainsi, n'importe quelle connaissance humaine peut être falsifiée par Dieu si ce dernier maintient la connaissance dans l'intellect humain quand l'objet a disparu:

«Dico quod omnis notitia create est limitate ad significandum sic esse sicut per eam denotatur, et ideo omnis notitia create potest esse error si sit de obiecto mutabili. Et ideo cum in anima beati et in anima Christi sint multae notitiae creatae quae sunt veridicae notitiae modo de creaturis, sicut

²² Cf. K. Tachau, Robert Holcot on Contingency and Divine Deception, dans: L. Bianchi (ed.), *Filosofia e teologia nel trecento. Studi in ricordo di Eugenio Randi* (Textes et Études du Moyen Âge 1), Louvain-la-neuve 1994, 157–196; H. Gelber, *It could have been otherwise. Contingency and Necessity in Dominican Theology at Oxford, 1300–1350* (Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 81), Leiden–Boston 2004, chap. 7: «Invincible Ignorance», 267–307.

quod sol movetur in caelo et quod luna eclipsabitur in tali tempore, dico quod istae possunt, si Deus voluerit, fieri errors et falsae opinionones.»²³

Par conséquent, directement ou indirectement (c'est-à-dire par l'intermédiaire d'un ange ou d'un homme), Dieu peut tromper, au sens de «être la cause» de l'erreur. De fait, on peut alléguer de nombreux exemples bibliques d'une telle tromperie, le plus fameux étant l'ordre donné à Abraham de sacrifier son fils. Dieu peut donc tromper au sens général du terme: il peut causer une erreur chez quelqu'un d'autre. Il n'y a qu'une seule restriction: Dieu ne peut pas tromper au sens restreint du terme, c'est-à-dire de façon injuste ou vicieuses:

«Isti termini fallere, decipere, mittere in errorem, vel facere hominem errare, vel causare errorem, et huiusmodi dupliciter possunt accipi. Uno modo communiter et tamen proprie, alio modo stricte et tamen improprie. Communiter et tamen proprie loquendo decipere vel fallere no est aliud quam esse causam erroris alicuius, et sic capio fallere et decipere in articulo pretractato. Secundo modo capiuntur tales termini stricte et improprie, ut in definitione exprimente quid nominis includuntur talia syncathegoreumata iniuste vel malitiose sine nitiose vel deordinate vela liquid equivalens, et sic fallere importat causare iniuste vel deordinate errorem, et sic loquuntur sancti de decipere et fallere, quando talem actum negant a deo.»²⁴

Quelles sont les conséquences de cette nouvelle conception de la tromperie divine? En premier lieu, comme l'ont souligné K. Tachau et H. Gelber, Holcot ne s'intéresse pas vraiment aux conséquences épistémologiques de la tromperie divine. Le monde créé, en tant que contingent, est radicalement incertain mais cette incertitude, finalement n'a pas d'impact du point de vue sotériologique qui intéresse Holcot. Le bienheureux peut être trompé à propos de la création, mais cela ne changera pas son statut de bienheureux. La tromperie divine rend donc manifeste la nécessité d'une absolue confiance en Dieu. Ce n'est pas la vérité mais la confiance qui sauve. Ce point est clairement exemplifié par l'histoire d'Abraham:

«Et immo dicendum quod absolute credidit quod debuit immolasse filium et quod deus voluit enim erronee credere hoc, ut ostenderetur mundo maxima fides et odedientia sua deo. Error tamen nec commendat fidem nec vituperat quia fuit inuincibilis, nec aliter placuit deo suam obedientiam experi-ri.»²⁵

Puisque la tromperie divine est un cas d'erreur invincible, ce n'est pas un péché que d'agir en étant trompé de la sorte. En effet, comme on l'a vu, il y a un consensus parmi les théologiens pour soutenir que l'erreur invincible excuse de la faute. En suivant saint Augustin, Holcot rejette le motif traditionnellement attribué aux sceptiques selon lequel toute erreur est une faute (*peccatum*). Là encore, en suivant la position commune parmi les théologiens, Holcot estime

²³ Robert Holcot, In IV libros Sententiarum, Lib. II, q. 2, a. 8, edd. P. Striverler/K. Tachau, Seeing the Future Clearly. Questions on Future Contingents by Robert Holcot (Studies and Texts 119), Toronto 1995, 157 sq.

²⁴ Ibid., Lib. III, q. u., a. 8, ed. Lyon 1518, fol. n. iii ra.

²⁵ Ibid., q. u., a. 7, fol. n. ii vb—n. iii ra

que nous devons distinguer l'erreur qui résulte d'une faute (*culpa*) de celle qui résulte d'une punition (*pena*)²⁶. Dans le premier cas, l'excuse de l'ignorance invincible n'est pas recevable, mais elle l'est dans le second cas. Or, notre faillibilité résulte d'une punition, consécutive au péché originel, mais cette faillibilité épistémologique est moralement excusable dans les cas d'ignorance invincible. Quiconque fait de son mieux (*facere quod est in se*) pour ne pas être trompé ne commet pas de faute si l'erreur ou la tromperie sont hors de ses capacités de contrôle. La faillibilité de nos facultés après le péché originel excuse donc notre incapacité à dépasser la tromperie. Pour cette raison, il est nécessaire de distinguer deux types d'erreur, une erreur dangereuse et une autre qui ne l'est pas. De façon générale, se tromper, c'est considérer le faux comme vrai. Mais l'erreur n'est dangereuse que si elle porte sur la foi. L'erreur n'est pas dangereuse, en revanche, dans les cas d'ignorance invincible, quel que soit le champ d'application. Cela signifie, premièrement, que l'erreur invincible, d'un point de vue épistémologique, n'a aucune importance, et deuxièmement que l'erreur d'un point de vue sotériologique peut être excusée. Cette dernière situation peut être exemplifiée par le cas bien connu de l'adoration du diable transfiguré (*casus* qui se ramène à une forme de tromperie démoniaque). Supposons que le diable, avec la permission de Dieu, prenne la forme du Christ et soit adoré par un *viator* comme étant le Christ. On aura alors une situation typique d'idolâtrie. Dans sa solution à ce *casus* classique, Holcot va plus loin que n'importe quel théologien avant lui. De fait, il considère que, puisque l'erreur est invincible, la conscience erronée nous oblige à cet acte d'adoration, qui est extérieurement un acte d'idolâtrie. Ici, cet acte d'idolâtrie est non seulement permis mais nécessaire au salut:

« Quod autem error suus sit invincibilis, patet ex casu, et sic consequenter dicebatur quod, si diabolus transfigureret se in effigiem Christi et deo permittente causaret firmam fidem in animo alicuius simplicis quod esset Christus, et talis simplex eum adoraret adoratione latræ et frueretur eo, posset dici consequenter quod talis meritorie frueretur diabolo et meritorie adoraret diabolum et peccasset mortaliter nisi hoc fecisset, si addatur ad casum quod conscientia sua sic sibi dictasset faciendum vel peccare mortaliter. »²⁷

Que peut-on alors en conclure concernant les rapports entre scepticisme et erreur invincible chez Holcot? Le dominicain est probablement l'un des théologiens les plus radicaux dans son usage à la fois de l'erreur invincible et de la tromperie divine. L'argument de la tromperie divine autorise une sorte de radicalisation de la contingence du monde. Dans la mesure où cette tromperie est un cas d'erreur invincible, elle exclut qu'aucun moyen naturel puisse nous permettre d'y échapper. Contrairement à Chatton, Holcot tire toutes les conclusions de cette situation. Premièrement, il refuse de réduire l'argument à une simple hypothèse théorique, négligeable en pratique. Deuxièmement, il tire les

²⁶ Ibid., L. III, q. u., a. 8, fol. n. iii vb.

²⁷ Robert Holcot, *Sex articuli*, a. 4, ed. F. Hoffmann, *Die 'Conferentiae' des Robert Holcot O.P. und die Akademischen auseinandersetzungen an der Universität Oxford 1330–1332* (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters, N.F. 36), Münster 1993, 109.

conséquences éthiques et sotériologiques de notre instabilité épistémique. Puisque nous ne pouvons jamais savoir si nous nous trompons ou non, nous devons faire de notre mieux pour connaître et appliquer la loi divine. Mais seule la pureté de l'intention et l'absolue confiance en Dieu peuvent nous prémunir véritablement contre l'erreur. Chez Chatton, l'expression « erreur invincible » vise seulement à souligner que nous ne pouvons pas y échapper. Chez Holcot, au contraire, le croisement de l'erreur invincible et de la tromperie divine apparaît comme un moyen de conduire à une forme de fidéisme où seule la foi comme confiance absolue en Dieu permet d'éviter le scepticisme. De fait, quel est le sens de l'exclusion d'une action vicieuse ou méchante de la part de Dieu (qui est rappelons-le la seule limite à la tromperie divine)? Cela signifie que le mensonge divin est seulement un cas extrême de contingence radicale, mais cette contingence ne contrevient en rien au salut du fidèle qui fait de son mieux. Cette lecture éthique et sotériologique du scepticisme est probablement la contribution la plus importante de Holcot à l'histoire médiévale du scepticisme.

IV. Conclusion

La principale contribution de la philosophie médiévale à l'histoire du scepticisme est sans doute l'élaboration de l'argument de la tromperie divine. Parmi les premiers à recourir à cet argument, Gauthier Chatton l'utilise en le rapprochant d'un concept issu de la théologie morale, le concept d'erreur invincible, afin de souligner que la tromperie divine est absolument indiscernable. Mais, en même temps, il limite le champ d'application de l'argument en le réduisant à une hypothèse purement théorique. Pour Chatton, il y a une confiance dans la fiabilité générale de l'ordre naturel des causes. Certes, cet ordre dépend entièrement de Dieu, mais nous n'avons aucune raison de supposer que Dieu veuille y contrevenir. La stabilité de cet ordre de causes, par ailleurs radicalement contingent, nous permet d'être confiant dans le fait que l'erreur est une exception et non la règle. Pourtant, Chatton est probablement le premier à insister à ce point sur la faillibilité de notre connaissance du monde. Une telle connaissance ne peut jamais tout à fait se prémunir contre le risque d'erreur. Notre savoir est donc largement conditionnel et dépend de l'hypothèse que Dieu préserve la stabilité de l'ordre naturel. D'un côté, donc, notre savoir peut être prémuni par l'hypothèse d'un ordre causal, mais d'un autre côté, quand on cherche à fonder cette hypothèse, on se trouve conduit à un point aveugle, et ce d'autant plus qu'une éventuelle tromperie divine relève de l'erreur invincible et ne peut être identifiée. Chatton se trouve ainsi reconduit là où il avait voulu conduire l'épistémologie de Pierre d'Auriose. C'est à Robert Holcot qu'il revient, en quelque sorte, de tirer les conséquences de l'utilisation épistémologique de la notion d'erreur invincible. Pour Chatton, finalement, la tromperie divine n'est encore qu'un simple test pour la théorie de la connaissance. En revanche, pour le dominicain, cette tromperie est un fait et ce fait doit conduire à une sorte de fidéisme.

Puisque la tromperie divine est indiscernable, mais bien réelle, on ne peut se contenter d'une solution de type conditionnel qui suppose que Dieu ne suspend pas l'ordre causal. C'est n'est pas dans l'ordre naturel qu'il faut placer sa confiance mais dans Dieu lui-même, avec cette conviction qu'il ne refusera pas sa grâce à ceux qui font de leur mieux²⁸. Nous devons faire de notre mieux pour remplir les commandements divins: même si l'on échoue ou si l'on est trompé par un démon ou par Dieu, nos efforts, la pureté de l'intention, seront récompensés.

²⁸ Sur cette question, voir l'analyse classique de H. Oberman, *Facientibus quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam*: Robert Holcot, OP and the Beginnings of Luther's Theology, in: *Harvard Theological Review*, 55 (1962), p. 317–342.

II. Irrtum und Fortschritt in den Wissenschaften

Abicienda est penitus ista sententia, tamquam error pessimus.

Alexander of Aphrodisias on the Human Soul:
The Philosophical Debate on Alexander's Error (*error Alexandri*)
from Albert the Great to Pietro Pomponazzi

OLAF PLUTA (Bochum)

In his treatise 'On the Soul', Alexander of Aphrodisias developed what today we would call a theory of emergence: the soul, in his view, is a power and form that supervenes on the particular mixture of its underlying body, which is blended and joined together in a specific way. Alexander thus outlined a non-reductive materialism which holds that, even though the human soul is exhaustively constituted of material elements, and hence dies together with the body, its complex behavior cannot be explained as being caused by physical properties¹.

When Alexander's theory became known in the Latin West during the thirteenth century, mainly through the quotations and summaries in Averroes's 'Long Commentary on the De anima' of Aristotle, translated around 1220/35, it was met with immediate resistance from Church officials. William of Auvergne, the Bishop of Paris, demanded in his own treatise 'On the Soul' ('De anima'), completed by around 1240, that Alexander's error (*error Alexandri*), which denies any future life, must be wiped out "as a radical and most pestilential plague"².

I. Albert the Great

The Dominican Albert the Great took up this challenge³. In his treatise 'On the Soul' ('De anima'), written in the years 1254–1257, Albert argued that,

¹ For this interpretation cf. Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On the Soul*, Part 1: Soul as Form of the Body, Parts of the Soul, Nourishment, and Perception, transl. (with an Introduction and Commentary) by V. Caston (Ancient Commentators on Aristotle), London e.a. 2014, Introduction: Supervenience and emergentism, 9–12.

² Guilielmus Alvernus, *Tractatus De anima*, cap. 5, pars 5, in: Guilielmi Alverni Opera omnia, Parisiis 1674, Tomus II, Pars II (Supplementum), 119a: "tanquam pestem radicalem ac pestilentissimam". William of Auvergne, *The Soul*. Translated from the Latin, with an Introduction & Notes by R. J. Teske (Mediaeval Philosophical Texts in Translation 37), Milwaukee (WI), Wisconsin 2000, 194.

³ William of Auvergne, Bishop of Paris from 1228, gave the Dominicans their first chair in theology at the university in 1229. The second Dominican chair was established in 1230, which

recounting the damning the critique by Averroes⁴, if the human soul were a material form, universal cognition would be impossible: universal cognition requires that the human intellect is an immaterial form. According to Albert, this “demonstratively destroys Alexander’s theorem” (“*demonstrative destruit dictum Alexandri*”) ⁵. Later, Thomas Aquinas used the very same reasoning as the main argument in his ‘Disputed Questions on the Soul’ (‘*Quaestiones disputatae De anima*’), composed in 1267: the human soul must be immaterial and hence immortal, because “the intellect is concerned with universals” (“*intellectus est universalium*”) ⁶. In conclusion, Albert emphasized that it would follow from Alexander’s theorem that the human soul perishes together with the body “*et multa alia, quae absurdissima sunt*”; consequently, he demanded: “*abicienda est penitus ista sententia, tamquam error pessimus*” (this position must be utterly abandoned as the worst error) ⁷.

Albert continued his crusade against Alexander⁸ in his treatise ‘On the Nature and Origin of the Soul’ (‘*De natura et origine animae*’), written in the years 1258–1262/1263, in which he claimed that Alexander’s theorem is considered “to be absurd by anybody philosophizing correctly” (“*quod est absurdum apud omnem hominem recte philosophantem*”) ⁹, “and therefore it is refuted by all philosophers” (“*et ideo ab omnibus refutatur philosophis*”) ¹⁰. In his commentary ‘On Animals’ (‘*De animalibus*’), written in the same period, he once again called Alexander’s theorem “the worst error” (“*error pessimus*”), ¹¹ and its consequences “ab-

would thereafter be known as the ‘external chair’, reserved for Dominican masters from outside Paris. Albert held this chair for three years from 1245 to 1248.

⁴ Albertus Magnus, *De anima*, lib. III, tract. 2, cap. 4, ed. C. Stroick, in: Alberti Magni Opera Omnia (editio Coloniensis), vol. VII/1, Münster 1968, 183,14–15: “*Et hae rationes Averrois contra Alexandrum sunt tenendae.*”

⁵ *Ibid.*, 182,92–93.

⁶ Thomas de Aquino, *Quaestiones disputatae De anima*, q. 14, ed. B.-C. Bazán, in: Thomae Aquinatis doctoris angelici Opera omnia (editio Leonina), vol. XXIV/1, Roma–Paris 1996, 126,214; *id.*, Questions on the Soul, transl. (from the Latin with an Introduction and Notes) by J. H. Robb (Mediaeval Philosophical Texts in Translation 27), Milwaukee (WI) 1984, 177. For Albert’s and Thomas’s theory of the human intellective soul cf. P. D. Hellmeier, *Anima et intellectus. Albertus Magnus und Thomas von Aquin über Seele und Intellekt des Menschen* (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters, Neue Folge 75), Münster 2011.

⁷ Albertus Magnus, *De anima*, lib. III, tract. 2, cap. 4, ed. Stroick (nt. 4), 183,19–21. Cf. A. de Libera, *Albert le Grand et la philosophie* (À la Recherche de la Vérité), Paris 1990, 222–232 (“*Le matérialisme psychologique: contre Alexandre d’Aphrodise*”); de Libera quotes Albert as condemning Alexander’s view as “une erreur très grave (*pessimus*), qui entraîne la destruction de toute la noblesse et de la perpétuité même (*perpetuitas*) de l’âme humaine” (*ibid.*, 224).

⁸ Albert was appointed as preacher of the crusade in 1263 by Pope Urban IV, and Albert called himself “*praedicator crucis*” several times. However, little evidence concerning this activity has survived. When Urban IV died in 1264, Albert’s work as preacher of the crusade came to an end.

⁹ Albertus Magnus, *De natura et origine animae*, tract. II, cap. 5, ed. B. Geyer, in: Alberti Magni Opera Omnia (editio Coloniensis), vol. XII, Münster 1955, 25,55–56.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25,67–68.

¹¹ Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus* (Nach der Cölner Urschrift), lib. XVI, tract. 1, cap. 3, ed. H. Stadler, 2 vols. (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters 15–16), Münster 1916

surd and adverse to truth”¹². Finally, in his ‘De causis et processu universitatis a prima causa’, written around 1264–1267, he denounced Alexander’s theorem as being “an intolerable and most pernicious error against philosophy”¹³.

Albert is, first and foremost, upset with Alexander of Aphrodisias because he denies immortality, resurrection, and eternal life, which are at the core of Christian belief. But he is also upset because, in his opinion, Alexander of Aphrodisias violates fundamental philosophical principles; that is why he calls Alexander’s position an error against philosophy itself.

Our intellect is concerned with universals, which are considered in complete abstraction from matter and from material conditions, that is to say, in a wholly immaterial way. Now each thing operates in accordance with what it is¹⁴. Consequently, our intellectual soul must be immaterial and hence immortal. No material composition whatsoever can prepare a material intellect for understanding universals, as Alexander of Aphrodisias holds. For Albert, Alexander’s position thus violates the said philosophical principle that operation follows upon being (*operatio sequitur esse*). Material faculties such as our bodily senses can only apprehend singularly; an immaterial faculty is required to apprehend universally¹⁵.

To sum up, Albert the Great held that universal cognition is proof that the human intellectual soul is immaterial and hence immortal.

II. John Buridan

John Buridan, to whom we will now turn, thought differently. Disruption drives change and brings about new paradigms and ways of thinking. This kind of innovative disruption can be found in John Buridan, who explicitly states that he argues against the common opinion held by many of his contemporaries and nearly all ancient commentators (“*multi et quasi omnes expositores antiqui*”), namely that human intellectual cognition must be universal precisely because the human intellect is an immaterial entity¹⁶.

and 1920, vol. 2, 1070,21–22: “*Est autem iste error pessimus et impediens omnem circa naturalia verum intellectum.*”

¹² Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, lib. XVI, tract. 1, cap. 3, ed. Stadler (nt. 11), vol. 2, 1070,25–26: “[...] *quae omnia sunt absurda et veritati inimica: propter quod ista sunt refutanda.*”

¹³ Albertus Magnus, *De causis et processu universitatis a prima causa*, lib. II, tract. 5, cap. 9, ed. W. Fauser, in: *Alberti Magni Opera Omnia* (editio Coloniensis), vol. XVII/2, Münster 1993, 176,65–66: “*Qui error intolerabilis est et valde perniciosus contra philosophiam.*”

¹⁴ Cf. Thomas de Aquino, *Quaestiones disputatae De anima*, q. 14, ed. Bazán (nt. 6), 126,202–203: “*Unumquodque autem operatur secundum quod est*”; transl. by Robb (nt. 6), 177.

¹⁵ Cf. Albertus Magnus, *De anima*, lib. III, tract. 2, cap. 4, ed. Stroick (nt. 4), 182,92–183,5: “*Id autem quod demonstrative destruit dictum Alexandri, est, quod omne quod recipitur in eo quod est in corpore sicut forma corporis, est particulare et (183) individuum, sicut probatur per omnia, quae sunt in virtutibus animae sensibilis. Si ergo intellectus possibilis esset huiusmodi forma, receptum in ipso esset particulare, et sic non esset intellectus receptivus universalis.*”

¹⁶ Johannes Buridan, *Quaestiones super libros Physicorum Aristotelis*, lib. I, q. 7, edd. M. Streijger/P. Bakker, in: *John Buridan, Quaestiones super octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis* (secundum ultimam lectionem), Libri I–II (History of Science and Medicine Library 50/Medieval and Early

Buridan only had the quotations and summaries in Averroes's 'Long Commentary on the De anima' of Aristotle available¹⁷. This was both an advantage and a disadvantage. On the one hand, his knowledge of Alexander was fragmentary at best. On the other hand, however, this gave him the opportunity to fill in the blanks, be creative, and come up with arguments and theories of his own.

In the beginning of his book 'On the Soul', Alexander of Aphrodisias "enjoined that when considering the soul in the first place one ought to know beforehand the wonders of the composition of the body of a human being"¹⁸. Before claiming that the human intellective soul is "more divine and greater than any bodily power"¹⁹, one should first look at the wonders of the human body and see if one can solve all puzzles about the soul by considering it as "something that also belongs to this body, which is constructed so incredibly and magnificently"²⁰.

This is exactly what Buridan does in the texts we are about to discuss here. We will focus on the third and final redactions of his Questions on the Physics and on the 'De anima' of Aristotle, both written between 1352 and 1357.

In both works, Buridan casts doubt on whether the human intellect cognizes universally because it is immaterial, and the senses apprehend singularly because they are material. For Buridan, this commonly held opinion is far from obvious²¹. Neither does universality necessarily follow from immateriality, nor does

Modern Science 25), Leiden–Boston (MA) 2015, 65,13–19: "*Ad primam et secundam dubitationes dixerunt multi et quasi omnes expositores antiqui quod ex eo intellectus apprehendit universaliter, quia est separatus et immaterialis, sic quod non est eductus de potentia materiae nec extensus extensione materiae; ideo non recipit modo singulari, cum ex extensione et divisione materiae proveniat divisio et multitudo individuorum in rebus materialibus. Ista opinio non videtur sufficiens.*"

¹⁷ Cf. id., *Questiones in De Anima* (tertia lectura), ed. J. A. Zupko, in: John Buridan's philosophy of mind: An edition and translation of Book III of his Questions on Aristotle's De anima (third redaction) with commentary and critical and interpretative essays (Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University 1989), 2 vols., Ann Arbor (MI) 1990, vol. 1, 22,58: "*Prima opinio fuit Alexandri, ut ibi recitat [Zupko: citat] Commentator.*"

¹⁸ This is Averroes's summary in his 'Long Commentary on the De anima' of Aristotle, in: Averroes (Ibn Rushd) of Cordoba, Long Commentary on the De anima of Aristotle, transl. (with introduction and notes) by R. C. Taylor (Yale Library of Medieval Philosophy), New Haven (CT)–London 2009, 310. Cf. Averrois Cordubensis Commentarium Magnum in Aristotelis De Anima libros, ed. F. Crawford (Corpus Commentariorum Averrois in Aristotelem, Versionum Latinarum VI/1), Cambridge (MA) 1953, 394,214–217: "*Et hoc aperte et universaliter propalavit in initio libri sui de Anima, et precepit ut considerans primo de anima debeat prescire mirabilia compositionis corporis hominis.*"

¹⁹ Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On the Soul*, transl. by Caston (nt. 1), 32,17. Alexander of Aphrodisias is alluding to Plato's 'Phaedo' (91C–D); cf. Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On the Soul*, transl. by Caston (nt. 1), 74, nt. 13.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 32,25–26.

²¹ Buridan did not devote an entire question to this problem. Instead, his considerations form a digression within his question as to "Whether universals are more known to us than singulars" ("*Utrum universalia sunt nobis notiora singularibus*"), which is discussed in the first book of his 'Questions on the Physics' (*Questiones in octo libros Physicorum* [ultima lectura], I, q. 7). A similar question ("*Utrum intellectus prius intelligat universale quam singulare vel e converso*") and a similar digression can be found in his 'Questions on the De anima' (*Questiones in tres libros De*

singularity necessarily follow from materiality²². In fact, universality or universal reference is a very general phenomenon and not exclusively tied to immaterial entities. On the contrary, it can also be found in the material realm, both in animate and inanimate nature. Buridan provides two examples:

The natural appetite of a thirsty and hungry horse is not directed singularly towards a specific source of water or grain, if nothing is in sight, but universally and indifferently towards any water and grain it may find. Therefore, the horse will drink and eat from whichever water or grain it encounters. Likewise, the natural appetite of fire is not directed singularly towards a specific piece of wood, but universally and indifferently towards any combustible wood. Therefore, the fire will burn whichever wood is nearby²³.

These two examples suggest that the human intellect, if taken to be a material form, can act universally in a similar fashion, that is, have universal cognition. But how does the human intellect actually cognize universally? In the subsequent paragraphs, Buridan outlines a theory of universal cognition that is compatible with his assumption of the human intellect as a material form.

What Buridan outlines here is a theory of representative likeness or similarity. According to Buridan, universal cognition is not constituted by directly referring to something universal but by a process of abstraction that finally results in a common concept (*conceptus communis*) which, while existing singularly in the intellect, becomes universal by indifferently representing or signifying all members of the same species. Thus, for Buridan, the universality of concepts does not consist in their mode of existence, but in their capacity to signify a plurality of individuals.

But how does the human intellect generate such a common concept? Buridan states, first of all, that the intellect does not have direct access to things, but

anima [ultima lectura], III, q. 8). For an edition and analysis of these texts cf. O. Pluta, John Buridan on Universal Knowledge, in: *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch für Antike und Mittelalter* 7 (2002), 25–46. Cf. Johannes Buridan, *Quaestiones super libros Physicorum Aristotelis*, lib. I, q. 7, edd. Streijger/Bakker (nt. 16), 65,19: “*Ista opinio non videtur sufficiens*”; id., *Quaestiones super libros De anima Aristotelis*, lib. III, q. 8, ed. Zupko (nt. 17), vol. 1, 71,177: “*Haec autem opinio videtur defectuosa*.”

²² Cf. Johannes Buridan, *Quaestiones super libros Physicorum Aristotelis*, lib. I, q. 7, edd. Streijger/Bakker (nt. 16), 65,19–66,5: “*Primo, quia Deus est summe separatus et immaterialis, sic quod non est eductus de potentia materiae; et tamen non intelligit modo universalis sicut nos, quia sicut dicit Commentator duodecimo Metaphysicae, hoc est intelligere res confuse et imperfecte non intelligendo distinctionem singularium, Deus autem omnia perfectissime et distincte intelligit, licet unica simplicissima intellectione. Sed de hoc est videndum in duodecimo Metaphysicae. Secundo est verum quod singularitas proveniat ex extensione vel materialitate, quia ita singulariter et distincte ab aliis existit Deus et intellectus noster sicut aliquid extensum, immo etiam terminus universalis ita singulariter et distincte ab aliis existit in intellectu tuo vel meo sicut albedo in pariete.*”

²³ Cf. *ibid.*, 66,6–14: “*Tertio, quia appetitus sensitivus ita est extensus et materialis sicut sensus; et tamen equus et canis per famem et sitim appetunt modo universalis. Non enim banc aquam vel banc avenam magis quam illam, sed quamlibet indifferenter; ideo quaecumque eis praesentetur, bibunt eam vel comedunt. Et etiam intentio, potentia vel appetitus ignis ad calefaciendum est modo universalis, scilicet non determinate ad hoc lignum, sed ad quodlibet lignum calefactibile indifferenter, licet actus calefaciendi determinatur ad certum singulare. Et ita etiam potentia visiva est modo universalis ad videndum.*”

must rely on the images (*species*) of the senses, which are their representative likenesses (*similitudines repraesentativae*). He assumes, secondly, that things of the same species share a greater likeness (*similitudo*) or conformity (*convenientia*) than things belonging to different species. This is why we say that a group of beings belongs to the same species. Thus, Plato and Socrates fit better into the same species than Socrates and the ass Brunellus. And Socrates and Brunellus fit better into the same species than Socrates and a stone²⁴.

The greater likeness, however, stems from the fact that two things belonging to the same species spring from the same or from similar natural causes, because in the order of beings they belong to the same grade or to grades relatively close to one another. In fact, two members belonging to the same most specific species (*species specialissima*) may share such a great likeness that the only way of perceiving their difference is by referring to their different locations²⁵.

For example, take two stones which are totally alike in size, shape, color, and all other respects. And assume that you only see one of them in front of you. After you have gone away, the first stone is replaced by the second. When you return, you will judge that the stone that is now there is the same that you saw before. But if both stones are placed in front of you, you will judge that they are different because of the difference in their location. This exemplifies how a common concept can signify members of the same species by showing that, as

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 66,15–27: “*Dico igitur, sicut mihi videtur, quod una causa in hoc quod intellectus intelligit universaliter, licet existat singulariter et res intellecta singulariter et intellectio etiam singulariter et omne aliud, est quia res intelliguntur non per hoc quod sunt apud intellectum, sed per suam similitudinem existentem apud intellectum. Res autem extra ex natura et essentia sua habent inter se convenientiam et similitudinem, ut suppono et postea declarabo. Modo si sit ita quod sint multa invicem similia, omne quod est simile uni eorum, quantum ad hoc in quo sunt similia, est simile unicuique aliorum. Ideo si omnes asini ex natura rei habent ad invicem convenientiam et similitudinem, oportet quod, quando species intelligibilis in intellectu existens repraesentabit per modum similitudinis aliquem asinum, ipsa simul indifferenter repraesentabit quemlibet asinum, nisi aliquid obstat, de quo postea dicitur. Ideo sic fiet universalis intellectio*”; *id.*, *Quaestiones super libros De anima Aristotelis*, lib. III, q. 8, ed. Pluta (nt. 21), 37: “*Si ergo volumus assignare unam causam, licet non sufficientem, quare intellectus potest intelligere universaliter, quamvis res intellectae nec universaliter existant nec universales sint, ego dico, quod haec est causa: quia res intelliguntur non propter hoc, quod ipsae sint in intellectu, sed quia species earum, quae sunt similitudines repraesentativae earum, sunt in intellectu. Unde dicitur tertio De anima: ‘lapis non est in anima, sed species lapidis’. Tunc accipimus, quod res extra animam singulariter existentes de eadem specie vel de eodem genere habent ex natura sui similitudinem seu convenientiam essentialiorem, quam illae, quae sunt diversarum specierum vel diversorum generum. Plus enim conveniunt ex natura rei Socrates et Plato quam Socrates et Brunellus (etiam quantum ad suas essentias). Et plus etiam conveniunt Socrates et Brunellus quam Socrates et ille lapis, quod propter hoc patet, quia in eis inveniuntur accidentia naturaliter convenientia essentiae eorum, magis similia et magis convenientia in his, quae sunt eiusdem speciei vel generis quam in aliis*”; cf. ed. Zupko (nt. 17), vol. 1, 73,237–74,256

²⁵ Cf. *id.*, *Quaestiones super libros De anima Aristotelis*, lib. III, q. 8, ed. Pluta (nt. 21), 37: “*Et huiusmodi maior essentialis convenientia provenit ex eo, quod illa, quae sunt eiusdem speciei vel generis, proveniunt ex eisdem causis vel similibus magis quam alia, propter quod in ordine entium sunt eiusdem gradus vel propinquiorum graduum ad invicem quam alia. Immo illae, quae sunt eiusdem speciei specialissimae, tantam habent essentialiorem convenientiam, quod tu non habes viam ad percipiendum eorum distinctionem nisi per extraneam*”; cf. ed. Zupko (nt. 17), vol. 1, 74,256–263.

in this case, one only has to abstract from the specific location to generate a concept that signifies both stones²⁶.

Based on the assumption that all members of the same species entertain such a relation of similarity, Buridan further assumes that, for this relation, the rule of transitivity holds. This means that, in Buridan's own words, if a group of similar things, that is, *a*, *b*, and *c*, are similar, and *d* is similar to *a*, then *d* must be similar to all the other elements of the group, that is to say, it must be similar to *b* and *c*. This rule ensures that all members of the same species can be signified by the same common concept. Again, we can assume that this rule of transitivity is guaranteed by the fact that *d* comes from the same or from a similar natural cause as *a*, *b*, and *c*²⁷.

Finally, Buridan concludes that such a common concept can be generated by the intellect if it is able to sort out size, location, and other accidental appearances and discern them from the substantial ones. If the intellect succeeds in abstracting the concept in such a way that the object is no longer perceived in the manner of something existing within the prospect of the cognizer (*in prospectu cognoscentis*), then there will be a common concept. For this reason, when the singular concept of Socrates has been abstracted in such a way, it will not represent Socrates any more than Plato, and there will be a common concept from which the name 'human being' (*homo*) is taken. Thus, understanding something in accordance with a common concept is all that thinking universally amounts to. And whatever faculty can perform an abstraction of this sort, whether it belongs to the senses or to the intellect, can be said to cognize universally²⁸.

²⁶ Cf. id., *Quaestiones super libros De anima Aristotelis*, lib. III, q. 8, ed. Pluta (nt. 21), 37: "*Verbi gratia, sint duo lapides similes in magnitudine et figura et colore et aliis singularibus accidentibus, et nunc videas unum et quantum potes considerare ipsum. Demum, te recedente, auferatur ille et ponatur alius locus eius. Tunc tu rediens indicabis, quod ille, qui nunc est ibi, sit idem, quae ante videbas. Et similiter color, quae in eo indicabis, sit idem ille color, quae ante videbas, et sic de magnitudine et figura. Nec tu habebis aliquam viam ad sciendum an ille est idem lapis vel alter (et sic etiam de hominibus). Sed si videas eos simul, tu indicabis, quod sunt alii per alietatem locorum vel situs*"; cf. ed. Zupko (nt. 17), vol. 1, 74,263–274.

²⁷ Cf. id., *Quaestiones super libros De anima Aristotelis*, lib. III, q. 8, ed. Pluta (nt. 21), 37 sq.: "*Postea ego iterum suppono, quod si sint aliqua ad invicem similia, quidquid est simile uni illorum, in eo in quo sunt duo in invicem similia, ipsum est simile unicuique illorum. Verbi gratia, si a, b et c sint similia secundum albedinem, quia sunt alba, sicut d est simile ipsi a, oportet, quod sit consimile ipsi b et c. Ideo consequitur ex eo repraesentatio fit per similitudinem, quod illud erat repraesentativum unius, erit in(38)differenti repraesentativum aliorum, nisi aliud concurrat, quod obstat, sicut dicitur post*"; cf. ed. Zupko (nt. 17), vol. 1, 74,274–75,283.

²⁸ Cf. id., *Quaestiones super libros De anima Aristotelis*, lib. III, q. 8, ed. Pluta (nt. 21), 38 sq.: "*Et hoc finaliter inferitur, quod cum species (et similitudo) Socratis fuerit apud intellectum et fuerit abstracta a speciebus extraneorum, illa non magis erit repraesentatio Socratis quam Platonis et aliorum hominum, nec intellectus per eam magis intelliget Socratem quam alios homines. Immo sic per eam omnes homines indifferenter intelliget uno conceptu, scilicet a quo sumitur hoc nomen 'homo'. Et hoc est intelligere universaliter. [...] Tunc ergo revertendo ad propositum dico, quod, cum intellectus a phantasmate recipit speciem vel intellectionem Socratis cum tali confusione magnitudinis et situs, facientem apparere rem per modum existentis in prospectu cognoscentis, intellectus intelligit illum modo singulari. Si intellectus potest illam confusionem distinguere et abstrahere conceptum substantiae vel albedinis a conceptu situs, ut non amplius res percipiatur per modum existentis in prospectu cognoscentis, tunc erit conceptus communis. Unde cum elicitus fuerit conceptus Socratis abstracte a*

Summarizing his theory of universal cognition, Buridan finally gives credit to Alexander of Aphrodisias as the most famous ancient commentator who upheld a materialistic theory of universal cognition, emphasizing that Alexander permitted that this faculty in men be called the intellect on account of its excellence and nobility over the cognitive powers of brutes²⁹.

Obviously, however, higher species of animals are capable of cognizing universally in the same way, although perhaps not as perfectly as humans. Today, we would speak of concept learning in nonhuman animals, which involves a process of categorization based on physical similarity such as the one outlined by Buridan. It may thus come as no surprise that discussions of animal intelligence can be found in John Buridan's works on natural philosophy. However, what Buridan actually has to say on the subject is quite amazing.

In another redaction of Buridan's lectures on the 'De anima' of Aristotle, when presenting the position of Alexander of Aphrodisias (*opinio Alexandri*), Buridan states that apes are ingenious compared to other animals and to some extent endowed with reason ("quodammodo rationabilis"), and that dogs and other animals are likewise capable of reasoning and concluding, although not in as sophisticated and complete a manner as man or ape ("immo et canes et alia animalia ratiocinantur et syllogizant, quamvis non ita subtiliter ac complete sicut homo vel simia"). Buridan is using the terms "ratiocinari" and "syllogizare" to emphasize that animal thinking is not different in principle from human thinking, but only differs in scope and complexity³⁰.

conceptibus albedinis et situs et aliorum accidentium vel extraneorum, ille iam non magis repraesentabit Socratem vel Platonem, et erit conceptus communis, a quo sumitur hoc nomen 'homo'. Et quaecumque virtus potest facere huiusmodi abstractionem, sive illa sit sensus sive intellectus, illa potest universaliter cognoscere"; cf. ed. Zupko (nt. 17), vol. 1, 75,283–290, 79,391–80,405.

²⁹ Cf. id., *Quaestiones super libros De anima Aristotelis*, lib. III, q. 8, ed. Pluta (nt. 21), 39: "Unde Alexander illam virtutem in nobis credidit esse materialem et extensam, quam tamen concessit in homine esse vocandum intellectum propter excellentiam et nobilitatem eius super virtutes cognoscitivas brutorum"; cf. ed. Zupko (nt. 17), vol. 1, 80,405–409.

³⁰ Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cod. lat. 15888, fol. 70ra: "In hac materia sunt tres opiniones magis famosae. Una fuit Alexandri, quod anima intellectiva humana est forma materialis, extensa et deducta de potentia materiae, generabilis et corruptibilis, ut est anima canis aut asini. Et dicebat hoc non debere negari propter magnam subtilitatem hominis vel eius ratiocinationem, quoniam hoc dicebat provenire ex nobilitate complexionis corporis humani vel ex nobilitate animae humanae super alias animas, sicut dicemus simiam (esse) ingeniosam super cetera animalia et quodammodo esse rationabilem, immo et canes et alia animalia ratiocinantur et syllogizant, quamvis non ita subtiliter ac complete sicut homo vel simia. Quod apparet, quia, si canis videt dominum suum et vult ire ad ipsum et in directa linea inveniat magnam foveam, non intrabit in illam, sed quaerit aliam viam, licet longiorem, quod non faceret, nisi ratiocinaretur et syllogizaret, quod non est bonum cadere in foveam et cetera. Et tunc Alexander solvebat auctoritates Aristotelis de separatione et perpetuitate intellectus dicens, quod hoc Aristoteles intelligebat non universaliter de omni intellectu, sed loquebatur semper indefinite, et erant dicta sua vera de intellectu divino; ideo in tertio huius loquens specialiter de intellectu humano, quando quaesivit, quare non reminiscimur post mortem, respondet, quod intellectus passivus, sine quo homo nihil intelligit, corrumpitur. Et dicit Alexander, quod per intellectum passivum intelligebat Aristoteles animam intellectivam humanam, quam dicebat esse formam substantialem corporis humani informantem corpus humanum inhaerenter, sicut anima canis informat eius corpus."

Buridan refers to a well-known example, namely a dog's use of logical reasoning in determining which way to go: "This is obvious, for if a dog sees his home and wishes to go there and encounters a large pit on the direct route, it does not enter the pit, but searches for another way, even if it is longer. The dog would not do this unless he reasoned and concluded (*nisi ratiocinaretur et syllogizaret*) that it would not be good to fall into the pit."

This ability of dogs had been known since antiquity. The Stoic philosopher Chrysippus, for example, describes a hunting dog's behavior as follows: When the dog comes to a three-way crossroads, he is said 'virtually' to go through a syllogism about his prey: 'The animal went either this way, or that way, or the other way. But not this way, or that way. So that way.' This example appears – with slight variations – in many places. In Philo and Aelian, the hunting dog comes to a pit (closely resembling Buridan's example) and has to decide if the prey turned left or right or went straight ahead and crossed the pit. Sextus Empiricus, who ascribes the example to Chrysippus, even specifies the syllogism: "the dog makes use of the fifth complex indemonstrable syllogism."³¹ According to Stoic logic, this syllogism took the form of: 'Either A or B or C; but neither A nor B; therefore C.'

The dog cannot, of course, verbalize his decision or reason in propositional form, but he may mentally represent the three possibilities in a manner that may be akin to the way humans would try to figure out which way to go. Even according to Aristotle, we would have to grant animals the capacity to engage in practical syllogism or reasoning. In the case of the thirsty horse above, appetite says 'I must drink', and perception says 'This is a drink'. The linking of the premises with the conclusion is a causal process, as suggested by Aristotle's discussion of human practical syllogisms in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and there is no apparent reason why animals should not be capable of such causal processes. Thus, even if animals do not 'explicitly' go through a practical syllogism, this fact does not suffice to justify the conclusion that they do not think logically³².

But let us return to John Buridan's discussion of what Albert the Great had called "*error Alexandri*".

In a series of four questions on the third book of the 'De anima' of Aristotle, which form a small treatise on the nature of the human intellect³³, Buridan

³¹ Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1, 69; transl. by R. G. Bury, Cambridge (MA) 1955, 43. Cf. J. Annas/J. Barnes, *The Modes of Scepticism*, Cambridge 1985, 36. For Buridan's use of this example and its relation to ancient Stoic logic cf. O. Pluta, *Mental Representation in Animals and Humans: Some Late Medieval Discussions*, in: G. Klima (ed.), *Intentionality, Cognition, and Mental Representation in Medieval Philosophy (Medieval Philosophy: Texts and Studies)*, New York (NY) 2015, 273–286.

³² Cf. R. Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals. The Origins of the Western Debate (Cornell Studies in Classical Philology 54)*, Ithaca (NY) 1993, 88. According to Buridan, a syllogism is a simple mental act within the soul, even though it is a complex semantical structure. Such an act may easily be possible for animals, even though they cannot express it by means of language.

³³ Question 3 asks whether the human intellect is the substantial form of the human body; question 4 whether it is an inherent form in the human body; question 5 whether it is one and the

discusses three competing positions: the positions of Averroes and Alexander of Aphrodisias, and the position of the Catholic faith, which Buridan introduces as “a truth of our faith (*veritas fidei nostrae*), which we must firmly believe”³⁴. However, while Averroes and Alexander of Aphrodisias offer coherent, if mutually exclusive, theories of the human intellectual soul, the position of the Catholic faith combines conflicting statements which cannot be reconciled by natural reason. According to Buridan, they are not demonstrable without a special and supernatural revelation: they can only be narrated without any proofs (“*narrandae sunt sine probationibus*”)³⁵.

Alexander’s position is summarized as follows: “The first opinion was Alexander’s, as the Commentator quotes there. Alexander said that the human intellect is a generable and corruptible material form, educed from the potency of matter, and extended by the extension of matter, just like the soul of a cow or the soul of a dog, and it does not remain after death.”³⁶

Averroes, for his part, had invoked numerous arguments against Alexander and contended that the human intellect was not a material form. However, Buridan claims that all these arguments are not demonstrative. He then proceeds to counter each of these arguments one by one. As Buridan cannot rely on Averroes for counter-arguments, it becomes clear that these arguments in favor of Alexander are in fact his own³⁷.

Not surprisingly, we here also find our argument drawn from universal cognition. According to Averroes, if the human intellect were a material form, it

same for all human beings; and question 6 whether it is everlasting. These four questions (lib. III, qq. 3–6) can be found in Zupko, John Buridan’s Philosophy of Mind (nt. 17), vol. 1, 20–56. For our interpretation, we have also made use of Zupko’s English translation (vol. 1, 242–280) and his commentary (vol. 2, 457–505).

³⁴ Johannes Buridan, *Quaestiones super libros De anima Aristotelis*, lib. III, q. 3, ed. Zupko (nt. 17), vol. 1, 22,74–75: “*Tertia opinio est veritas fidei nostrae, quam (Zupko: quae) firmiter debemus credere.*”

³⁵ *Ibid.*, q. 6, 51,104–108: “*Sed credo quod oppositae conclusiones non sunt demonstrabiles sine speciali et supernaturali revelatione. Nunc narrandae sunt sine probationibus conclusiones vel propositiones quae in hac materia secundum fidem sunt tenendae.*” Previously, Buridan had pointed out that the position of faith, namely that the human intellect is made by means of creation, cannot be demonstrated by natural reason. On the contrary, natural reason dictates that everything made in time is made in the mode of natural generation. Consequently, the position of faith can only be narrated without proof. Cf. *ibid.*, q. 4, 33,121–34,128: “*Quarta ratio est quia humana ratio, circumscripta fide, aut etiam fides, non dicitur quod intellectus tuus esset antequam tu esses, nisi poneretur perpetuus et unicus, sicut voluit Commentator. Si autem esset factus de novo, hoc aut esset per modum creationis, quod ratio naturalis, circumscripta fide, non dicitur, aut hoc esset per modum generationis naturalis, et tunc esset eductus de potentia materiae et imbaerens*”; *ibid.*, q. 6, 49,61–66: “*Nam si intellectus non sit perpetuus, ipse est factus, et ratio naturalis non dicitur, sine fide vel supernaturali revelatione, quod aliquid esset factum per modum creationis, sed quod omne factum de novo sit factum per modum naturalis generationis ex subiecto praesupposito, de cuius potentia forma educeretur ab agente.*”

³⁶ *Ibid.*, q. 3, 22,58–62: “*Prima opinio fuit Alexandri, ut ibi recitat [Zupko: citat] Commentator. Dicebat Alexander quod intellectus humanus est forma materialis generabilis et corruptibilis, educta de potentia materiae, et extensa extensione materiae, sicut anima bovis aut anima canis, et non est manens post mortem.*”

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 26,152–153: “*Unde Alexander sic respondisset ad illas rationes ut puto.*”

would be unable to conceive anything except singularly and individually, just like the senses. Therefore, it could not cognize universally.³⁸

To this argument Buridan replies on Alexander's behalf that an extended power is indeed carried to its object in a universal way, just like the horse's appetite. For the thirsty horse desires water, and not determinately this water or that water, but indifferently any water at all. Therefore, it drinks whichever water it finds³⁹.

In conclusion, Buridan states that philosophers who follow natural reason alone would have to concur with Alexander's position that the human intellectual soul is just as material as 'the soul of a cow or the soul of a dog'. "My proof is that I think that a pagan philosopher would maintain the opinion of Alexander" (*"Probo quia ego puto quod philosophus paganus teneret opinionem Alexandri"*)⁴⁰.

Subsequently, Buridan emphasizes several times that pure natural reason (*"ratio pure naturalis"*) forces us to accept Alexander's position: if we were to put our Catholic faith aside (*"fide catholica circumscripta"*), our natural reason would dictate it (*"ratio naturalis nostra dictaret"*)⁴¹.

In the final question, which, as Buridan remarks, has been raised so that everything which has been said in the preceding questions might be reviewed⁴², he summarizes all statements which "someone would put forward if he used natural arguments alone, without the Catholic faith"⁴³. At the very end of his argumentation, in the final conclusion, Buridan endorses Alexander's opinion⁴⁴,

³⁸ Ibid., 25,130–134: "*Quarta ratio ad conclusionem principalem est quia si esset eductus de potentia materiae et extensus, tunc non potest recipere nisi singulariter et individualiter, sicut sensus. Ideo nihil posset cognoscere universaliter.*"

³⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 26,171–27,175: "*Ad quartam rationem dixisset Alexander quod virtus extensa bene fertur in obiectum summo modo universali, sicut appetitus ipsius equi. Equus enim sitiens appetit aquam, et non determinate hanc vel illam, sed quamlibet indifferenter appetit. Ideo quaecumque invenit, eam bibit.*" This counter-argument is later repeated; cf. *ibid.*, 44,134–137: "*Ad quartam dictum fuit prius quod appetitus sensitivus, quantumcumque sit multiplicatus et individuatus et extensus, potest appetere modo universali, ideo etiam diceretur quod hoc non est impossibile de virtute cognoscitiva.*"

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 32, 80–81.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, q. 5, 42,91–94: "[...] puto [Zupko: puto] quod, fide catholica circumscripta et supernaturali infusione notitiae veritatis in nobis, ratio naturalis nostra dictaret quod intellectus humanus esset eductus de potentia materiae et generabilis et corruptibilis." Cf. *ibid.*, 43,117–119: "[...] si fide circumscripta aliquis procederet ratione pure naturali sine supernaturali infusione, illa ratio dictaret"; *ibid.* q. 6, 49,62–64: "[...] ratio naturalis non dictaret, sine fide vel supernaturali revelatione, quod aliquid esset factum per modum creationis."

⁴² Cf. *ibid.*, q. 6, 48,46–47: "*Veritas huius quaestionis apparet ex praecedentibus, sed mota est ut omnia recolligantur simul.*"

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 48,48–49,52: "*Et enumerato primo conclusiones quas aliquis poneret si sine fide catholica solum rationibus naturalibus uteretur, per principia ex sensibilibus [Zupko: speciebus] habentibus evidentiam per naturam sensus et intellectus, sine speciali et supernaturali revelatione.*"

⁴⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 51,99–101: "*Septima conclusio infertur quae est opinio Alexandri: quod est generabilis et corruptibilis, extensus, eductus, imhaerens et multiplicatus.*" It should be noted that the question does not end here. Following the requirements of the Parisian Statute of April 1, 1272, Buridan must finish it with a formal declaration that all conclusions against the Catholic faith are not true. "But nevertheless, it must be firmly maintained that not all of these conclusions are true, since they are against the Catholic faith. But I believe that the opposing conclusions are not demonstrable

This is indeed what natural reason has to say concerning the nature of the human intellect: pure natural reason dictates that the human intellective soul is just as material as ‘the soul of a cow or the soul of a dog’. Thinking is not exclusively human, even if there is an enormous difference in complexity between human and animal thinking.

Only a few generations after Buridan, in the fifteenth century, Alexander’s position had become commonplace at the University of Paris, so much so that an anonymous commentator of Peter of Dresden’s ‘Parvulus philosophiae naturalis’, a late-medieval handbook on natural philosophy⁴⁵, wrote: “*Alia est opinio Alexandri commentatoris [...]. Et illum communiter sequuntur Parisienses. Similiter Buridanus tenet hanc opinionem in suis quaestionibus*” (“Another is the opinion of Alexander [...]. And this one the Parisians commonly follow. Likewise, Buridan maintains this opinion in his own Questions”)⁴⁶.

After the decline of the University of Paris, following the Great Schism of the West, which lasted from 1378 to 1417, many new universities were founded throughout Europe during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries⁴⁷. At several of these universities, John Buridan was required reading, and Alexander’s posi-

without a special and supernatural revelation” (ibid., 51,102–105: “*Sed tamen firmiter tenendum est quod non omnes conclusiones sunt verae, quia sunt contra fidem catholicam. Sed credo quod oppositae conclusiones non sunt demonstrabiles sine speciali et supernaturali revelatione*”). Thus, while complying with the rules and declaring that the position of the Catholic faith is true, he once again makes clear that pure natural reason (*ratio pure naturalis*) must beg to differ.

⁴⁵ The ‘Parvulus philosophiae naturalis’ was written around 1400 by Peter of Dresden, probably in Prague. Even though the ‘Parvulus philosophiae naturalis’ was widely read in the fifteenth century, especially at the universities in Leipzig, Erfurt, Basel, Vienna, and Craców, it is now quite unknown to us. Around 80 manuscript copies have been identified so far. Of the many extant commentaries, only four have been identified: the early printed texts of the Thomist Johannes Peyligk from Leipzig (Lipsiae per Melchior Lotter 1499), the *modernus* Bartholomaeus Arnoldi de Usingen from Erfurt (Lipsiae per Wolfgangum Stöckel 1499), the Humanist Matthias Qualle from Vienna (Hagenaw in officina Heinrici Gran 1513), and the Scotist Jan ze Stobnicy from Craców (Basilea ex officina Ade Petri 1516).

⁴⁶ Eichstätt, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. st 685, fol. 358va: “*Alia est opinio Alexandri commentatoris qui vult quod intellectus humanus incepit esse per generationem sicut alia forma (bruti), et dicit quod sit forma educta de potentia materiae, generabilis et corruptibilis, coextensa corpori sicut alia forma bruti. Et illum communiter sequuntur Parisienses. Similiter Buridanus tenet hanc opinionem in suis quaestionibus.*” Cf. M. J. F. M. Hoenen, *Speculum philosophiae medii aevi. Die Handschriftensammlung des Dominikaners Georg Schwartz* († nach 1484) (Bochumer Studien zur Philosophie 22), Amsterdam–Philadelphia (PA) 1994, 105. I follow the text of the manuscript Eichstätt, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. st 685, which once formed part of the collection of George Schwartz († 1484), a German Dominican who studied at Leipzig, Bologna, and Cologne, and who later became a lecturer at the Dominican convent in Eichstätt. A description of the manuscript can be found in Hoenen, 62–72. For an interpretation of this passage cf. Hoenen, 102–106.

⁴⁷ Heidelberg (1386), Ferrara (1391), Turin (1404), Leipzig (1409), St Andrews (1413), Rostock (1419), Catania (1434), Barcelona (1450), Glasgow (1451), Greifswald (1456), Freiburg im Breisgau (1457), Basel (1460), Munich (1472), Tübingen (1477), Uppsala (1477), Copenhagen (1479), Genoa (1481), Aberdeen (1495), Santiago de Compostela (1495), Valencia (1499).