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Medieval Theology and Philosophy from a Cross-Cultural Perspective

Edited by
Yuehua Chen, Xiaochao Wang and Ishraq Ali

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Editorial

Medieval Theology and Philosophy: A Cross-Cultural Tapestry

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Over the last few decades, medieval theology and philosophy has undergone a profound transformation. While it was once regarded as mainly the domain of European Latin Christendom, medieval intellectual history is now understood as an intricate, dynamic and polycentric web of cross-cultural engagements. With the rise of cross-cultural research methodologies, recent scholarship in the field of medieval theology and philosophy increasingly focusses on shared concerns, mutual influences and profound interactions among the thinkers across Islamic, Christian, Jewish, Chinese, Indian and other intellectual traditions that flourished from late antiquity through the fifteenth century. This recent reorientation has certainly enriched and diversified medieval theological and philosophical debate. At the heart of this transformation is a recognition of the profound interconnectedness of the medieval world wherein the dialogue is not restricted by geographical boundaries, and religious, cultural and linguistic differences serve as the catalyst for innovation and deeper reflection. The Special Issue, titled *Medieval Theology and Philosophy from a Cross-Cultural Perspective*, explores the rich and complex interactions among diverse intellectual traditions in the medieval period. It brings together a collection of articles that highlight the interconnectedness of theological and philosophical thought across cultural, religious and linguistic boundaries.

The translation movement, which took place between the 8th and the 10th centuries largely in Baghdad, was one of the most significant cross-cultural phenomena.[1] During this movement, works from various cultures were collected and translated into Arabic. According to O'Meara (2005, p. 186), because of the translation movement, "the curriculum typical of the later Greek Neoplatonic schools such as that of Alexandria was known in Baghdad". This movement ensured the availability, in Arabic, of the Greek scientific and philosophical writings, such as those of Aristotle, Plato and Plotinus, to the medieval Islamic philosophers (Black 2011, p. 57).[2] These texts influenced and shaped medieval Islamic philosophy (Falsafa) and theology (Kalam). In his contribution to the Special Issue, Ismail Lala (2023) deals with Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī's reception and treatment of Aristotelian hylomorphisms. He points out that some medieval Islamic philosophers adopted Aristotelian views as they were, whereas others reformulated them in accordance with their own preferences. Lala (2023) argues that Ibn 'Arabī is one of the second kind of medieval philosophers as he does not simply adopt Aristotelian metaphysics but "fundamentally alters it and carries out a total theologization of it by drawing on Qur'anic terms and prophetic traditions and explicating them through hylomorphism."

Aristotle provides cosmological proof for the existence of God, arguing for God as the "First Mover" of celestial bodies. Avicenna, medieval Islamic philosopher, critiques Aristotle's cosmological proof and offers a metaphysical proof for God's existence via syllogism that deduces God as the Necessary Existent from universal existence. Thomas Aquinas,

medieval Christian philosopher, not only revives Aristotle's cosmological approach but also expands it by integrating creationist theology and identifying God as both First Mover and Creator. In her contribution, Xin Liu (2024) examines the differences in these three approaches to proving God's existence, and highlights the philosophical, theological and metaphysical factors responsible for these differences.

In addition to classical Greek philosophy, the Neoplatonic tradition greatly influenced medieval thought. The *Liber de Causis*, a brief treatise on Neoplatonic metaphysics, presumably authored by an anonymous Arab scholar, serves as a bridge between late ancient Greek, Arabic and Latin medieval philosophy. This treatise presents a theory of creation marked by a clear distinction between being and essence. In his contribution, Lingchang Gui (2023) explores, from the perspective of historical reception, the origins of this distinction in the treatise "and how it underwent development in the medieval Arab community (especially Avicenna) and subsequently impacted Aquinas's thought and how Aquinas transformed it even further in terms of monotheism." In this way, Gui (2023) demonstrates the exchanges, fusions and civilizational transitions that characterize medieval philosophy.

Dionysius Areopagita is an important Neoplatonic philosopher and Christian theologian who lived and worked during the late 5th and early 6th centuries. In his contribution, Jiansong Nie (2025) examines the way Dionysius Areopagita brings together Plato's allegory of the cave and the biblical narrative of Moses encountering God in darkness on Mount Sinai. Nie (2025) challenges Denys Turner's limited analysis by tracing three reinterpretations of divine darkness: Porphyrius' Neoplatonic view of darkness as a providential, divine presence in the material world; Origen's alignment of Platonic light imagery with Moses' partial vision of God, framing darkness as temporary ignorance; and Gregory of Nyssa's emphasis on divine transcendence beyond human perception, rendering Moses' ascent an endless journey. The study concludes that Dionysius integrates these into a "triple divine darkness"—cosmological (material world as divine echo), mystical (God's transcendence beyond intelligibility), and Christological (divine concealment in the Incarnation)—ultimately positing God as perpetually dwelling in darkness, negating any association with visible light.

The interaction between religion and philosophy is one of the major and recurrent themes in medieval thought. Because of their different nature, the interaction between religion and philosophy often manifests in the form of conflict in medieval thought as instantiated by the Averroes versus Al-Ghazali polemic. However, in his contribution, Ishraq Ali (2023) argues that, contrary to the Averroes versus Al-Ghazali polemic, Alfarabi, the founder of Islamic political philosophy and Neoplatonism, reconciles philosophy and religion in his political thought, despite viewing philosophy as superior. While philosophy provides rational truth for the philosophers, religion offers symbolic truths accessible to the masses, ensuring societal cohesion. Alfarabi's ruler, a philosopher-prophet, combines both forms of knowledge to govern effectively, demonstrating that harmony between philosophy and religion is essential for the existence and stability of Alfarabi's virtuous city (Ali 2023).

The debate between Thomas Aquinas and Islamic Falsafa philosophers, particularly Avicenna and Averroes, on the nature of intellect and its role in explaining natural prophecy is the central theme of the contribution of Zhenyu Cai to the Special Issue. Aquinas criticizes Falsafa philosophers' emanation theory of concepts and their doctrine of the unity of intellect, which together form the basis of the Falsafa theory of natural prophecy. Cai (2024) defends the Falsafa theory of natural prophecy by defending the Falsafa philosophers' emanation theory of concepts and their doctrine of the unity of intellect. He argues that, in his critique, Aquinas overlooks Falsafa's nuanced metaphysical framework, rooted in rationalist and cultural contexts, which redefines thought as a transcendent act rather than an individual property.

While mainstream Muslim and Jewish Mutakallimūn defined necessary knowledge as immediate, indubitable cognition (e.g., sense perception, self-evident axioms), Saadya controversially extended this category to include mediate, deductive knowledge (e.g., inferring fire from smoke) and introduced a second-order necessary knowledge derived from the inherent connections between primary necessary truths. In their contribution to the Special Issue, Dong and Memet-Ali (2025) argue that Saadya's approach synthesizes Kalam's cognitive necessity with logical entailment, reframing deduction as a process of uncovering latent, interconnected knowledge structures rooted in empirical and intellectual foundations. This positions Saadya as expanding Kalam epistemology by integrating elements of Hellenistic scientific reasoning (e.g., Galenic demonstration) while maintaining alignment with classical Kalam principles of subjective certainty and empirical priority.

Kemal Batak's contribution to the Special Issue explores Ibn Rushd's (Averroes) formulation of the teleological argument, framing it as a form of reflective knowledge rooted in Aristotelian virtue epistemology. By emphasizing metaphysical principles such as the First Agent, First End, and de re necessity—concepts that underscore the universe's intrinsic, unalterable order—Ibn Rushd posits that the world's design reflects a divine creator and represents the "teleologically best of all possible worlds." The study underscores his integration of religious accessibility and philosophical depth, demonstrating how both simplified deductive reasoning (for the public) and complex metaphysical analysis (for philosophers) converge to affirm God's existence as certain knowledge (Batak 2024). This challenges interpretations that diminish the argument's epistemic robustness or reduce it to anthropocentric claims.

The concept of analogia entis (analogy of being) is one of the important topics discussed in the Special Issue. Xiaoyan Xu's contribution to the Special Issue examines how Thomas Merton's later theology employs analogia entis to confront modern spiritual and existential challenges. It critiques neo-scholastic dualism and secular materialism, emphasizing Merton's revival of natural contemplation (rooted in patristic cosmology), symbolic epistemology (prioritizing sacramental meaning over utilitarian signs), and non-dual awareness (resonating with Zen's self-transcendence). Merton's framework underscores God's dynamic presence in-and-beyond creation, promoting a theology that integrates mysticism, interfaith dialogue and a holistic response to modernity's fragmentation (Xu 2024).

There are two articles in the Special Issue which provide a comparison between Christian and Hindu mystical traditions. The first of these articles, authored by Jianye Liu and Zhicheng Wang, explores the structural symmetry between Meister Eckhart's Christian mysticism and Hindu Vedānta. Liu and Wang (2023) identify a convergent "seesaw" dynamic in Eckhart and Vedānta, where both resolve dilemmas of divine–human unity by emphasizing impersonal divinity and the sanctity of worldly action. The second article, authored by Yixuan Liu, compares Bonaventure's six-stage Christian spiritual ascent with Śankara's sixfold Vedānta practices. Liu (2024) highlights Bonaventure's and Śankara's shared methodologies of disciplined mental/spiritual cultivation to achieve oneness with ultimate reality, despite their divergent theological premises.

The relationship between Chinese and Christian thought is explored in three contributions to the Special Issue. In the first of these contributions, Lin Wang (2024) compares the localization of early Christianity in Rome and Buddhism in China through Tertullian's *Apology* and Mou Zi's *Answers to the Skeptics*. The two texts reveal a similar three-step localization strategy: one, distinguishing the faith from the pre-existing ones; two, incorporation of local ideas and ideologies; and three, integration into societal structure and norms. Wang (2024), however, points out a critical divergence in the socio-political contexts of the two religions: Christianity maintained strong political independence in Rome's reli-

giously pluralistic environment, enabling its eventual rise to state religion with institutional autonomy, while Buddhism encountered China's Confucian-dominated state ideology, which was deeply intertwined with political power, forcing Buddhism into a subordinate, adaptive role without displacing Confucian orthodoxy. This fundamental difference in religion–state relations shaped their historical trajectories, leading to Christianity's political ascendancy in the West and Buddhism's syncretic assimilation in China. In the second contribution, Amy Yu Fu (2024) addresses the historical misinterpretation of Neo-Confucian concepts by 17th-century Jesuit missionaries, who dismissed Neo-Confucianism's spiritual dimensions due to Aristotelian biases, hindering interreligious dialogue. Through a comparative analysis of Zhu Xi's *Reflections on Things at Hand* and Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, the study finds that both traditions emphasize ethical engagement grounded in interconnectedness. However, their methods diverge: Neo-Confucianism prioritizes removing desires to achieve equilibrium and societal harmony through ritual propriety and quiet-sitting, while Ignatian spirituality focuses on discernment of spirits and indifference to worldly attachments via imaginative contemplation. Fu (2024) concludes that these approaches offer complementary insights for cross-cultural spiritual enrichment, such as applying Ignatian imagination to Neo-Confucian narratives and integrating daily ethical practice into retreat-based exercises. In the third contribution, Yanbo Zheng (2024) explores the possibility of understanding medieval Christian mystical theology, specifically Saint Bernard of Clairvaux's exegesis of the biblical "Song of Songs", through the lens of ancient Chinese poetry, namely the *Book of Odes (Shijing)*. It addresses the challenge of cross-cultural interpretation by employing Gadamer's concept of the "fusion of horizons", arguing that the shared, universal human experience of love depicted in both texts—despite their distinct cultural and religious origins—provides a common ground for Chinese readers to access Bernard's theology. Applying Bernard's theological interpretations to the *Shijing* reveals resonant themes, demonstrating that this cross-textual approach is not only feasible but also helps dispel misconceptions about Bernard's theology. The findings affirm that the *Shijing* serves as a vital cultural stepping stone enabling Chinese readers to comprehend Bernard's mystical framework, highlighting the shared emotional foundations of human nature across civilizations and the potential for cross-cultural theological dialogue (Zheng 2024).

Finally, we would like to thank the Editor-in-Chief of the journal for providing a platform for this Special Issue. We would also like to thank the editorial staff of the journal for their support in the production of the Special Issue. We cannot forget to thank the anonymous reviewers for their constructive criticism and feedback, which played a central role in assessing and improving the quality of the articles included in the Special Issue. It is important to acknowledge the financial support of various funding agencies. Last, but by no means least, we are grateful to the contributors to the Special Issue. We hope that this Special Issue will serve as a valuable resource for those interested in understanding medieval theology and philosophy from a cross-cultural perspective, and that it will stimulate further investigations in the field.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Notes

[1] For a detailed analysis of the translation movement see (Gutas 1998).

[2] We must clearly distinguish between the translation movement and the transmission of Greek thought to Medieval Islamic philosophers. It is true that the availability, in Arabic, of Greek corpus to medieval Islamic philosophers ultimately owes to the translation movement. However, the transmission of Greek thought to medieval Islamic philosophers was a complex phenomenon and the translation movement was a significant part of it. For a detailed discussion on the transmission of Greek thought to medieval Islamic philosophers see (Ali 2022).

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Article

Ibn ʻArabī and the Theologization of Aristotelian Hylomorphism

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Abstract: The works of Aristotle left an indelible impression on Arabic philosophy after the translation movement. While many philosophers accepted the works of the revered First Teacher (*Al-Muʻallim al-awwal*), as Aristotle was designated, others sought to reformulate his ideas in accordance with their own priorities. One such thinker is the hugely influential mystical theorist, Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ʻArabī (d. 638/1240), who agrees with Aristotle that all existents are hylomorphic compounds made from the combination of form with matter that comes from prime matter, or *hyle* (*hayūlā*), which he frequently uses interchangeably with 'substance' (*jawhar*). He claims that prime matter or substance accepts all forms (*ṣuwar*), but he theologizes these terms as he believes all things are loci of divine manifestation. Ibn ʻArabī thus situates Aristotelian hylomorphism within the framework of his own metaphysics. He proceeds to equate the universal *hayūlā* with the primordial 'cloud' (*'amā'*), mentioned in prophetic traditions, from which all things in the different levels of existence derive because of the existentiating divine breath. When it comes to the sensible world in particular, Ibn ʻArabī employs the Qur'anic term of 'dust' (*habā'*) to denote prime matter that serves as the basis of sensible hylomorphic compounds. This study conducts close textual content analysis to demonstrate the way in which Ibn ʻArabī theologizes Aristotelian hylomorphism to expound his conception of the different realms of existence.

Keywords: Ibn ʻArabī; hylomorphism; prime matter; form; substance

1. Introduction

It is a matter of scholarly consensus that Aristotle exerted an incredibly powerful influence on Islamic philosophy specifically, and medieval Islamic thought more generally (Alwishah and Hayes 2015). This study does not propose to investigate the myriad ways in which this titan of philosophy, 'often revered in the Islamic world as the "First Teacher/Philosopher" (*al-muʻallim al-awwal*)' (Alwishah and Hayes 2015, p. 1), influenced the Arabic tradition. The goal of this study is far more modest. It scrutinizes how Aristotle's hylomorphism was adopted and then theologized by arguably the most influential proponent of speculative Sufism in Islamic intellectual thought, Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ʻArabī (d. 638/1240) (Knysh 1999; Landau 2008; Dagli 2016).

Hylomorphism is the metaphysical view of Aristotle that substances are made up of matter and form. The matter/form distinction is too familiar and well known as to require exposition. Suffice it to say that the idea permeated the intellectual milieu of Andalusia and had a powerful influence on Ibn ʻArabī (ʻAfīfī 1963, p. 405; Al-Ḥakīm 1981, p. 703; Rosenthal 1988, p. 28). Nevertheless, Ibn ʻArabī does not simply adopt this view; he fundamentally alters it and carries out a total theologization of it by drawing on Qur'anic terms and prophetic traditions and explicating them through hylomorphism. The next section explores just how he achieves this.

2. Ibn ʻArabī and Hylomorphism

Suʻād al-Ḥakīm writes in her magisterial lexicon of Ibn ʻArabī's nomenclature that the mystic agrees with Aristotle by affirming that substances are hylomorphic compounds

and so he 'distinguishes between form (*ṣūra*) and prime matter (*hayūlā*), or between body and soul' (Al-Ḥakīm 1981, p. 703). Nevertheless, since in Ibn 'Arabī's theological ontology all things are loci of divine manifestation because they are representations of God's 'most beautiful Names' (*Al-Asmā' al-ḥusnā*) that are delineated in the Qur'an (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, vol. 1, pp. 48–49), he applies this principle to 'all levels of existence' (Al-Ḥakīm 1981, p. 703). This means that not only are the primary substances in the sensible realm hylomorphic compounds, but so are the immaterial substances in the pre-sensible realms of divine manifestation (Chittick 1982). However, the pre-sensible realms are pervaded by a different kind of prime matter (Izutsu 1983, pp. 133–34). This means that all loci of the knowable aspect of God are manifested as hylomorphic compounds (Al-Ḥakīm 1981, p. 703). In this sense, since the forms in which the divine Names of God are manifested are the actualization of their potentiality to be manifested, they represent the outer aspect (*ẓāhir*) of God, commensurate with His divine Name 'The Manifest' (*Al-ẓāhir*) (Qur'an 57:3), while prime matter represents their potentiality to be manifested and thus are representations of the inner, hidden aspect (*bāṭin*) of God, intimated by His divine Name, 'The Hidden' (*Al-Bāṭin*) (Qur'an 57:3) (Al-Ḥakīm 1981, p. 703).

Ibn 'Arabī elaborates on the nature of the relationship between prime matter and the divine Names in the *Fuṣūṣ* when he says,

> The possessor of spiritual realization (*ṣāḥib al-taḥqīq*) sees multiplicity (*kathra*) in the One, just as they know that the meanings of the divine Names (*Al-Asmā' al-ilāhiyya*), even though their realities are different and many, are of one essence (*'ayn wāḥid*). This is therefore multiplicity comprehended in the One of essence (*Wāḥid al-'ayn*), so in manifestation (*tajallī*) it is multiplicity witnessed in one essence, just as prime matter (*hayūlā*) takes on the outline (*ḥadd*) of every form (*ṣūra*), and it [i.e., prime matter], despite the multiplicity and differences of its forms, in reality comes from one substance (*jawhar*), which is its prime matter (Ibn 'Arabī 2002, pp. 124–25).

Ibn 'Arabī draws a parallel between prime matter taking on any form and the single essence of God taking on the manifestations of the divine Names in reality. In both cases, says Ibn 'Arabī, the essence is the same, whether it is prime matter or the divine essence that constitutes reality, but they are manifested and comprehended in multiple forms. Mu'ayyid al-Dīn al-Jandī (d. 700/1300?), whose commentary of the *Fuṣūṣ* is one of the most important early commentaries as Richard Todd points out (Todd 2014, p. 23), makes it clear that according to Ibn 'Arabī, all the divine Names have the same source just as all forms have prime matter as their basis,

> In the opinion of the people of spiritual unveiling (*ahl al-kashf*) . . . there is no 'otherness' (*ghayriyya*) in reality due to the one essence being seen and manifested in forms that resemble one another and are never ending in their multiplicity, just as that which is shown as the Powerful (*Al-Qādir*), the Creator (*Al-Khāliq*), the Provider (*Al-Razzāq*) is only Allah. For He is the Provider, the Powerful, the Creator, but the different forms of manifestation are in terms of His power, creative ability, and provision, so all agree that the One named is the same (Al-Jandī 2007, p. 391).

It is significant that Ibn 'Arabī mentions both things that are manifested and things that are comprehended in the above passage from the *Fuṣūṣ*. This could mean that he refers to the things in the sensible world that have perceptible existence as well as those that do not, or it could mean that he refers to both of these in addition to those things that are immaterial in the pre-sensible realms of existence. Ḥakīm, Toshihiko Izutsu, and Henry Corbin point out that Ibn 'Arabī refers to the latter as he does not restrict the manifestation of the divine Names to the sensible world; rather, he applies it to all pre-sensible realms and all levels of existence (Al-Ḥakīm 1981, p. 703; Izutsu 1983, p. 134; Corbin 2008). In fact, Nūr al-Dīn al-Jāmī (d. 898/1492), who was 'a pre-eminent poet-theologian from the school of Ibn 'Arabī' (Rizvi 2006, p. 59), categorically states that the concept of prime matter

for the mystic is 'more general' than it is 'in the terminology of the philosophers' (*iṣṭilāḥ al-ḥukamā'*) because it is not restricted to the sensible world as it is for the philosophers (Al-Jāmī 2009, p. 293). Dawūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350), whose commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ* was among the most widely read from the time it was written (Chittick 2007b, p. 518), and who was instrumental in 'helping popularize and disseminate some of the more difficult teachings of the *Fuṣūṣ* commentators who preceded him' (Rustom 2005, pp. 54–55), expatiates on this issue. He writes that what is meant by prime matter in this passage is 'the universal prime matter' (*al-hayūlā al-kulliyya*) which 'accepts all the spiritual (*rūḥāniyya*) and physical (*jismāniyya*) forms of existents' in all realms of existence (Al-Qayṣarī 1955, p. 790).

These commentators thus agree that for Ibn 'Arabī, prime matter is the source of 'matter' both in the physical world and the non-physical worlds. However, the pre-sensible realms require a different kind of prime matter (see Section 3). Qayṣarī elaborates that this means prime matter is comprehended in the forms of existent beings just as the divine essence is comprehended in the forms of existents (Al-Qayṣarī 1955, p. 790). Since all levels of existence are manifestations of the divine Names of God, not just the sensible world, all existents in those realms as well as the sensible one are loci of divine manifestation and are hylomorphic compounds of divine matter and the form of the Names they are manifesting. In this sense, Ibn 'Arabī remains faithful to Aristotle because even though Aristotle states that the most perspicuous examples of primary substances are things that are perceptible by the senses, he allows that they can be things that are not perceptible as well (Cohen 2020).

Ibn 'Arabī states that all things in all levels of existence are manifestations of the divine essence constituted in the forms of the divine Names in the same way as prime matter takes on the 'outline' or physical boundaries of all forms. He continues that all this comes from one substance, or *jawhar*, which satisfies Aristotle's criterion of independence (Aristotle 1984). However, at the end of the aforementioned passage of the *Fuṣūṣ*, Ibn 'Arabī claims that this substance is prime matter, which means Ibn 'Arabī identifies substance with prime matter when Aristotle seems to reject this because even though prime matter appears as though it satisfies the criterion for independence because it is self-subsisting, it is nevertheless dependent on the form in which it is manifested and so it cannot meet the requirement of separability that a substance must have (Aristotle 1984; Cohen 2020). Qayṣarī concurs that in Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysics, prime matter and substance are interchangeable, and he himself uses them in the same way (Al-Qayṣarī 1955, p. 790).

A key expositor of Ibn 'Arabī's technical nomenclature, 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413?), clarifies that Ibn 'Arabī identifies prime matter with substance as well as other things (Al-Jurjānī 1845, p. 83). This represents somewhat of a break from Aristotle as for him, a substance is truly independent and prime matter is not, as stated. Arguably the most influential promulgator of Ibn 'Arabī's concepts and technical terms, 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī (d. 736/1335?) (Al-Qāsimī n.d.; Lala 2019) explains that substances in Ibn 'Arabī's philosophical outlook denote the things that remain constant and never change, whether they are physical or not (Al-Qāshānī 1992, p. 43). They are thus the immutable things on which all other things depend, which is more-or-less consistent with Aristotle's definition of it because all things in the *Categories* are predicated on the substances in one way or another (Aristotle 1984). This means that Ibn 'Arabī agrees with some aspects of Aristotle's definition of a substance while rejecting others.

For Ibn 'Arabī, then, the divine substance is the divine essence that is the cause of all levels of reality. This, again, is concordant with Aristotle's delineation of substances as the causes and starting points of all things (Aristotle 1984; Cohen 2020). Ibn 'Arabī explains that although substances are the causes of all things in all levels of existence, ultimately, it is the divine substance that is the cause and starting point of everything. Ibn 'Arabī calls this divine substance 'the substance of substances' (*jawhar al-jawāhir*) (Al-Ḥakīm 1981, p. 297). He writes that this is also known as 'the reality of realities' (*ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā'iq*) because it is the cause of, and also pervades, all levels of existence. He writes that the substance of substances

> is the reality of realities of the cosmos in its entirety . . . which is manifested eternally and temporally. So if you say this thing is the cosmos, you are correct; and if you say it is the God, the Eternal, be He praised, you are correct . . . for it is everything and includes temporality and eternality. And it becomes numerous through the multiplicity of existent beings, but it is not divided through multiple beings . . . so you can name it [all the] realities that it comprises (Ibn ʻArabī 1918, pp. 16–19).

In the sense that the divine substance is the cause and starting point of all levels of reality, and because primary substances are the things in reality, the term 'substance' is eternal and temporal. It is eternal if it denotes the divine substance that is the cause of all reality, and it is temporal if it refers to a primary substance in sensible reality or something in the pre-sensible realms (Chittick 2007a, p. 506). The divine substance, says Ibn ʻArabī, thus 'becomes numerous through the multiplicity of existent beings, but it is not divided through multiple beings'. Ibn ʻArabī is careful to underscore that just because the divine essence or divine substance is manifested in innumerable primary substances in different levels of reality, it does not mean that God's simplicity is violated in any way. This emphasis on divine simplicity, again, demonstrates influences of Ibn ʻArabī's philosophical forbears, especially Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī (d. 279/873), the first peripatetic philosopher, known as the 'philosopher of the Arabs' in order to 'emphasize his noble lineage' (Adamson 2016, p. 26), who goes to great lengths to highlight that within divine oneness is implicit divine simplicity (Al-Kindī 1948), and the ubiquitous Abū ʻAlī ibn Sīnā (d. 429/1037), whose influence on Ibn ʻArabī has been emphasized by recent scholarship (Lala and Alwazzan 2023a, 2023b), and who defends divine simplicity on the grounds of God's necessary existence (McGinnis 2022, pp. 98–101).

Ibn ʻArabī is explicit that substance is prime matter when he writes that the connection the substance of substances or the reality of realities has with the cosmos is

> like the connection (*nisba*) a piece of wood (*khashaba*) has to a chair, or a chest (*tābūt*), or a pulpit (*minbar*), or a mahmal . . ., so take this connection and do not think that there is any diminution (*nuqṣ*) in it like it is thought that there is diminution in the wood by the separation of an inkwell (*maḥbara*) from it . . . so name this thing . . . prime matter (Ibn ʻArabī 1918, pp. 16–19).

Things that are made from a piece of wood, like a chair, or a chest, or a pulpit, or a mahmal, are actualizations of the potentiality of the wood to be those things. The influential mystic, ʻAbd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731), who was well versed in both exoteric and esoteric sciences, and was an important promulgator of Ibn ʻArabī's ideas (Sukkar 2014; Pagani 2022), concurs that Ibn ʻArabī does indeed view substance as prime matter. In imitation of Ibn ʻArabī, he says that prime matter is 'the matter (*mādda*) from which things are made, like wood for a door, a bedstead, a box, a key, a large bowl (*qaṣʻa*), a chair, and other things' but all these forms, he adds, both 'perceptible and intellectual forms (*ṣuwar maḥsūsa wa maʻqūla*) are maintained by the existence of God, the Exalted' (Al-Nābulusī 2008, vol. 2, p. 33).

Ibn ʻArabī cautions against viewing these things as the amount of wood that is subtracted from a piece of wood because an inkwell or any other thing is made from it. On the contrary, the inkwell or the chair actualizes the potential of the wood. The philosophical interpreter of Ibn ʻArabī's ideas, Alāʾ al-Dīn ʻAlī ibn Aḥmad al-Mahāʾimī (d. 835/1432) (Chittick 2007b, p. 520), agrees with his forebear and articulates that prime matter is the underlying matter that subsists through formal changes in hylomorphic compounds (Al-Mahāʾimī 2007, p. 354). This means that it is misguided to deem prime matter to increase or decrease with the emergence of hylomorphic compounds; it is more accurate to view prime matter as pure potentiality that is actualized by the combination with forms. The pre-modern Ḥanafī commentator of the *Fuṣūṣ*, Muṣṭafā ibn Sulaymān Bālī Zādeh (d. 1069/1659), declares that Ibn ʻArabī views hylomorphic compounds as actualizations of potentialities, like a seed that has the potentiality of a tree within it (Bālī Zādeh 2003, p. 173).

In this passage, then, Ibn ʻArabī is unequivocal that prime matter is the wood to the hylomorphic compounds of the chair or pulpit, etc. It therefore seems that Ibn ʻArabī agrees with Aristotle that a substance is independent and separable, and that it is the starting point and cause of things in different levels of existence. He also states that all things in the cosmos depend on the divine substance for their existence. However, he intimates that prime matter, which is the undifferentiated matter that becomes the four elements in the sublunar world and combines with all the forms of things to make hylomorphic compounds (Izutsu 1983, p. 134), is also substance. Prime matter, thus, seems to satisfy the requirements for independence and separability for Ibn ʻArabī whereas that is not the case for Aristotle, as mentioned.

However, perhaps the most important difference between Aristotle and Ibn ʻArabī is that since the Sufi asserts that all levels of existence are only manifestation of God's divine Names, substance, prime matter, and the forms of existents are all divine. It is the divine substance that is the cause and starting point of existence. It is prime matter that is the divine substrate that underlies all things in the sensible realm, and a different kind of prime matter that underlies all things in the pre-sensible worlds. And it is the form of the divine Names that are manifested in the pre-sensible and the sensible worlds (Ibn ʻArabī 1918, pp. 16–19; Ibn ʻArabī 2002, pp. 124–25). In this way, Ibn ʻArabī carries out a thorough theologization of Aristotle's hylomorphism. Perhaps even more significant is the activation of prime matter, and what allows it to combine with forms in the pre-sensible and sensible worlds. Ibn ʻArabī attributes this impetus to the 'breath of the Compassionate' (*nafas al-Raḥmān*).

3. The Breath of the Compassionate and Prime Matter

Ibn ʻArabī writes that hylomorphic compounds are created when prime matter combines with forms in the sensible world. This happens when the 'breath of the Compassionate' pervades prime matter and allows it to actualize its potentiality to become hylomorphic compounds that are loci of divine manifestation. This means that not only are the hylomorphic compounds divine, but the impetus for their generation is also divine. Ibn ʻArabī writes,

> Nature (*ṭabīʻa*) comes before things that emanate from it in forms. And in reality, nature is only the 'breath of the Compassionate', for in it are introduced (*infataḥat*) the forms of the cosmos (*ṣuwar al-ʻālam*), both its higher and lower ones, due to the diffusion (*sarayān*) of the breath in the prime substance (*al-jawhar al-hayūlānī*), particularly in the realm of physical bodies (*ʻālam al-ajrām*). As for its [i.e., the breath] diffusion to bring forth luminous spirits (*al-arwāḥ al-nūriyya*) and accidents (*aʻrāḍ*), that is due to another kind of diffusion (Ibn ʻArabī 2002, p. 219).

There are many things of interest in this short passage from the most important and most comprehensive chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ*: the chapter of Muḥammad. This is because this chapter has the clearest exposition of unity and multiplicity in the entire work, as intimated by Ibn ʻArabī's principal disciple (Elmore 1997; Todd 2014), Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274) (Al-Qūnawī 2013, p. 117). Ibn ʻArabī explains that it is the existentiating breath of the Compassionate that introduces both the higher and lower forms of the sensible world and pervades prime matter thereby allowing the potentiality of prime matter to combine with the forms of the physical world and generate hylomorphic compounds that are loci of divine manifestation. Ibn ʻArabī identifies an all-pervading mercy here that brings all things into existence because it is the breath from the divine Name, the Compassionate, that brings forth all existence (Nettler 1978; Murata 1992; Hirtenstein 1999; Lala 2020).

Ibn ʻArabī says that the higher and lower forms of the sensible world are generated when the existentiating mercy of the divine breath is spread over prime matter. Mahā'imī explains that the higher forms are the 'spiritual' (*rūḥānī*) forms that exist in the sensible world but do not have perceptible existence, like the soul. He juxtaposes this with the lower forms, which are those things that do have perceptible existence; in other words, 'bodies

and their accidents and faculties' (Al-Mahā'imī 2007, p. 699). Qayṣarī is also of this opinion (Al-Qayṣarī 1955, p. 1175).

Ibn 'Arabī continues that it is when the breath of the Compassionate pervades prime matter that the hylomorphic compounds, which are loci of divine manifestation, are generated. He emphasizes that this is particularly the case in 'the realm of physical bodies'. By stating this, Ibn 'Arabī intimates that there is a different kind of prime matter in the pre-sensible realms that constitutes pure potentiality and which the forms of immaterial beings actualize. Qāshānī, in his most detailed lexicon of Ibn 'Arabī's nomenclature, *Laṭā'if al-i'l ām*, concurs with this. He explicates that the term 'prime matter' (*hayūlā*) only refers to the sensible world and the 'physical forms' (*ṣuwar jismiyya*) that are generated from prime matter. Whereas the term 'prime matter of prime matters' (*hayūlā al-hayūlayāt*) is what 'the people of spiritual realization (*muḥaqqiqūn*) use to refer to the reality of realities', which is 'the inner (*bāṭin*) aspect of every divine reality (*ḥaqīqa ilāhiyya*)', so it is 'the inner aspect of every concealed thing' (Al-Qāshānī 2005, p. 698). These 'concealed things' are imperceptible beings in pre-phenomenal realms of existence. Ibn 'Arabī expresses the same sentiment when he declares that another kind of prime matter is pervaded by the existentiating divine breath and results in the actualization of immaterial hylomorphic compounds in the pre-sensible realms of existence. Mahā'imī clarifies that this is because the hylomorphic compounds in the pre-sensible realms 'are free from [physical] matter' (Al-Mahā'imī 2007, p. 700).

It is also noteworthy that Ibn 'Arabī employs the term 'the prime substance' (*al-jawhar al-hayūlānī*) when referring to prime matter, thereby underscoring that he views prime matter and substance as interchangeable. Commentators of the *Fuṣūṣ* affirm that this is what Ibn 'Arabī means. Jāmī, for instance, defines 'prime substance' as that which 'accepts physical forms' (*ṣuwar jismāniyya*), which is the same definition as that of prime matter (Al-Jāmī 2009, p. 519). Mahā'imī gives a virtually identical definition to this (Al-Mahā'imī 2007, p. 699). In the same vein, Bālī Zādeh states that prime substance is prime matter for physical things (Bālī Zādeh 2003, pp. 318–19). Nābulusī puts it even more categorically when he states that prime substance is the basis of the four elements in the physical world, which is precisely what prime matter is (Al-Nābulusī 2008, vol. 2, p. 443).

This means that in Ibn 'Arabī's ontology, prime matter is most explicitly the undifferentiated basis of the four elements in the sensible world. Yet, there is also another kind of prime matter that is responsible for the emergence of immaterial hylomorphic compounds in the pre-sensible realms. Ibn 'Arabī employs the term prime matter for both of these, and he also adopts the term 'prime substance' as a synonym for prime matter since he views them as interchangeable. In addition, Ibn 'Arabī effects a complete theologization of these aspects of hylomorphism because he asserts that the cause of matter and form combining is the breath of the Compassionate in the pre-sensible and sensible realms, and also because the result of this combination—the hylomorphic compounds, whether they are perceptible to the senses or not—are all loci of divine manifestation. But he does not stop there. In order to fully integrate his outlook into orthodox Islamic thought, he states that the breath of the Compassionate is also the 'cloud' (*'amā'*), mentioned in the prophetic traditions (*ḥadīths*). In this way, he expresses ideas in terms that are prophetic (and Qur'anic) (see Sections 4 and 5), thereby offering all of his metaphysics as nothing but exegesis of these texts (Nettler 2012, pp. 13–16).

4. The Breath of the Compassionate and the Cloud

Ibn 'Arabī draws on the prophetic tradition in which Prophet Muḥammad was asked, 'O Messenger of God! Where was our Lord before He created His creation?' To this, Prophet Muḥammad replied, 'He was in the cloud (*'amā'*), no air (*hawā'*) was under Him, nor was air above Him' (Ibn Mājah n.d., vol. 1, p. 64; Al-Tirmidhī 1975, vol. 5, p. 288; Ibn Ḥibbān 1988, vol. 14, p. 9; Al-Ṭabarānī 1994, vol. 19, p. 207; Al-Ṭayālisī 1999, vol. 2, p. 418; Ibn Ḥanbal 2001, vol. 26, p. 108). This tradition has confounded many commentators. Muḥammad Anwar Shāh Kashmīrī (d. 1927), described as 'one of the most distinguished Is-

lamic scholars of the Indo-Pak Subcontinent' (Osman 2001, p. 1), simply writes that the best thing to do is leave the interpretation of this tradition to God (Kashmīrī 2004, vol. 4, p. 276). The Persian scholar, Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286), who was famed for his expertise in 'all branches of the Islamic Sciences (*al-ʿUlūm al-Islāmiyya*)' (Ibrahim 1979, p. 311), writes in his commentary that this tradition is essentially beyond the ken of human understanding, but Prophet Muḥammad just employed the cloud as a metaphor to denote an absolute vacuum (*khalā'*), which is 'an expression (*'ibāra*) for non-corporeality (*'adam al-jism*)' as it would be more comprehensible for his interlocutor (Al-Bayḍāwī 2012, vol. 3, p. 455). Edward Lane writes that it comes from the same root as blindness (*'—m—y*) because 'it means anything that the intellectual faculties cannot perceive, and to the definition of which the describer cannot attain' (Lane 2003, vol. 5, p. 2161).

Ibn 'Arabī, however, does not subscribe to the notion of the tradition's inscrutability, instead writing that the cloud was 'the first receptacle (*ẓarf*) to accept the "being-ness" (*kaynūna*) of God' (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., vol. 2, p. 310). He explains elsewhere that this means that the cloud was the first creation, or the first differentiation of the divine in the form of creation, saying, 'it was the first locus of divine manifestation (*maẓhar ilāhī*) in which He was manifested' (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., vol. 1, p. 148). The cloud, therefore, is the first recipient of the breath of the Compassionate that acts as a gateway to the emergence of hylomorphic compounds, as Ibn 'Arabī alludes to when he remarks that God 'created them [i.e., all existent beings] in the cloud, and it is the breath of the Compassionate' (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., vol. 3, p. 465). He elaborates on this elsewhere when he says the following,

> The origination of this cloud was from the breath of the Compassionate . . . so all existent beings (*mawjūdāt*) are manifested in the cloud by [the divine command] 'Be!' or by the hand of the divine or by the His two hands except the cloud itself, for its emergence was specifically by the breath . . . and the basis of that command was love (*ḥubb*) . . . as has been reported [that God declared,] 'I was a treasure and I was not known, so I wanted (*aḥbabt*) to be known', so through this love the breathing came into being and the breath was manifested and so it was the cloud (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., vol. 3, p. 430).

Ibn 'Arabī explains that the breath of the Compassionate brings forth the cloud because it is the first recipient of the mercy of existentiation, or the love that God had to see Himself in something other than Himself (Nettler 1978; Murata 1992; Lala and Alwazzan 2023a). The basis of this is the prophetic tradition in which God declares His 'yearning' to be known as He is a 'hidden treasure' (*kanz makhfiyy*). Even though the hugely significant and 'innately combative scholar', Taqī al-Dīn ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) (El-Tobgui 2020, p. 1), who 'was particularly well grounded in *ḥadīth*' (El-Tobgui 2020, p. 80), classified this tradition as 'false' (*bāṭil*) (Al-Ṣanʿānī 2011, vol. 2, p. 359), Mullā 'Alī Qārī (d. 1014/1605?), who was also 'a renowned scholar and commentator [of *ḥadīth*]' (Alavi 1983, p. 73), states that it is indeed a tradition of Prophet Muḥammad despite the fact that the wording is not entirely accurate (Qārī 2002, vol. 1, p. 199). Ibn 'Arabī, who himself was an expert in prophetic traditions (Brown 2017, p. 190), acknowledges that it is 'a tradition that is sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) on the basis of spiritual unveiling (*kashfan*) [only], and it is not proven through transmission from the Messenger of God, peace be upon him' (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., vol. 2, p. 399). This showcases Ibn 'Arabī's propensity to reclassify the reliability of prophetic traditions based on his spiritual unveiling, or esoteric knowledge (Lala 2022).

It was the divine desire to be known, as the prophetic tradition states, which resulted in the breath of the Compassionate, and the effect of the breath was to produce the cloud. All hylomorphic compounds in all realms of reality are then further differentiations of the divine in the cloud and come into being through other channels that are delineated in the Qur'an. These include the creative command 'Be!' that is mentioned in Q16:40, in which God declares, '*Whenever we intend something, we say only 'Be!' and it is*'. Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), whose commentary of the Qur'an is regarded as the pinnacle of polyvalent exegesis (Calder 1993, p. 110), asserts that this means all existents in the world are products of the divine creative command, including the actions of humankind because

'most of our actions occur against our aims and intentions', so if they are not directed by the divine will that issues the creative command, then they would appear without any purpose (Al-Qurṭubī 1964, vol. 10, p. 106).

There are other things that are created by God's 'hand' in the cloud, or by both His 'hands', says Ibn 'Arabī. In this, he agrees with his exoteric counterparts. It is reported in the compilations of traditions and commentaries of the Qur'an that the companion of Prophet Muḥammad, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar (d. 74/693), son of the second caliph, said, 'God created four things with His "hand": the Throne (*al-'arsh*), Ādam, the Pen (*al-qalam*), and Eden, then He commanded the rest of His creation, "Be!" and it was' (Al-Ḥākim 1990, vol. 2, p. 349; Al-Qinnawjī 1992, vol. 5, p. 15; Al-Sam'ānī 1997, vol. 6, p. 265; Al-Ṭabarī 2000, vol. 21, p. 239; Al-Lālikā'ī 2003, vol. 3, p. 477; Al-Tha'labī 2015, vol. 22, p. 573). These four things, therefore, are singled out and are created separately to the rest of the creation that is brought forth through the divine creative command.

Ibn 'Arabī also differentiates between those things created by God's 'hand', and those things created by His 'two hands'. Only Ādam is given the distinction of being created by the two 'hands' of God, as explicitly stated in Q38:75 when God asks Satan, '*O Satan, what prevented you from prostrating before that which I created with my own two hands?*' Most scholars agree that the designation of 'two hands' when referring to the creation of Ādam is metaphorical (Al-Maẓharī 1992, vol. 8, p. 192), and denotes the privileged position Ādam holds in the creational hierarchy (Al-Qurṭubī 1964, vol. 15, p. 228). The Ottoman era judge and exegete, Abu'l-Thanā' al-Ālūsī (d. 1270/1854), whose diverse educational background from 'the traditionalist al-Musilli, the Salafi al-Suwaydi, and the Sufi revivalist Khalid al-Naqshbandi' gives his commentary an outlook that imbibes all these traditions (Nafi 2002, p. 474), writes that the reason Ādam is singled out for creation with 'two hands', is to emphasize the divine creative power that is displayed in his creation, or because of the comprehensive nature of Ādam who embodies both the angelic and the animalistic aspects of creation since 'the actions of angels are carried out by him, as if they are the effects of the right hand, and the actions of animals are committed by him, as if they are the effects of the left' (Al-Ālūsī 1994, vol. 12, p. 216).

Ibn 'Arabī explains that all the existents, notwithstanding those with the privileged rank of being created by the 'hand/s' of God, are generated by the creative command of 'Be!' He agrees with the exegetical tradition in this regard. Nevertheless, he asserts that this creative command only brings forth existents in the cloud. Therefore, the cloud is already in existence before the command is issued. This, he clarifies, is because the cloud itself is the result of the breath of the Compassionate. The ontological hierarchy that Ibn 'Arabī sets up, therefore, is one in which the divine wants to be known in a creational other, which issues forth the existentiating mercy that takes the form of the breath of the Compassionate, which itself takes the form of the cloud in which all existents are created through the divine creative command or, in the case of favored creations, through the hand/s of God.

This means that the cloud is the starting point and cause of things in the different levels of existence, which is Ibn 'Arabī's definition for substance as he agrees with Aristotle in this regard. Ibn 'Arabī makes this clear when he asserts,

> The cloud was the substance of the cosmos (*jawhar al-'ālam*), so it accepted all the forms, souls, and natures (*ṭabā'i'*) of the cosmos … thus the cloud is from His breath, and the forms that are expressed from it in the cosmos are from the word, 'Be!' (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., vol. 3, p. 420).

The cloud is the substance in the sense that it is the starting point and the cause of all existents in the different levels of reality, since it is the first differentiation of the divine. It also 'accepted all forms … of the cosmos' and so it is prime matter because all the forms in the cosmos 'are expressed from it' through the divine creative command. Ibn 'Arabī articulates this even more perspicuously when he proclaims that 'God, the Exalted, introduced the forms of everything besides Himself from the cosmos in the cloud' (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., vol. 2, p. 310). The exception of 'besides Himself' requires some explanation because it has already been mentioned that all existents are loci of

divine manifestation. Ibn ʻArabī wishes to underscore that even though all hylomorphic compounds are manifestations of God's most beautiful Names, they are not as God is in His absolute essence, which is beyond comprehension let alone manifestation (Lala 2019). The absolute essence of God is thus not manifested in the cloud or in any other form of creation. Prime matter, therefore, accepts all the forms of the divine Names of God—not the apophatic divine essence—and this results in hylomorphic compounds in all levels of existence. Ibn ʻArabī also employs the Qur'anic term 'dust' (*habāʾ*) to refer to the prime matter that accepts the forms of the divine Names and uses it synonymously with substance.

5. Prime Matter and Dust (*habāʾ*)

The term 'dust' (*habāʾ*) is mentioned twice in the Qur'an. In Q25:23 when God warns, *And we shall turn to those deeds that they committed, and we shall make them into scattered dust (habāʾ manthur)*, and in Q56:6 when God declares that He will pound the mountains into '*scattered dust*' at the end of time. ʻAlī ibn Muḥmmad al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), more known for his works on the intersection of political theory and Islamic jurisprudence (Calder 1986, p. 44), writes in his somewhat overlooked work on Qur'anic exegesis that there are five meanings of the term '*habāʾ*':

1. It is the dust raised by a riding animal (*rahj al-dābba*).
2. It is the particles that are like dust seen in rays of sunlight (*shiʻāʾ al-shams*) when it comes through an aperture (*kuwwa*).
3. It is what the wind scatters of the dry leaves of trees.
4. It is a meat broth/gravy.
5. It is ashes (*ramād*) (Al-Māwardī n.d., vol. 4, p. 141).

Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), whose important contribution to the genre of Qur'anic exegesis is only recently being recognized (Saleh 2016), adds that it could also mean the dust on clothes (Al-Māturīdī 2005, vol. 8, p. 19).

While the Qur'an uses *habāʾ* to connote both the deeds of evildoers coming to nothing and the pulverization of the mountains at the end of days, Ibn ʻArabī focuses on the latter denotation only and deems *habāʾ* to be the prime matter that accepts the forms of the divine Names, in the same way as dust is the minute building block of the mountains and the physical world more generally. He writes that the *habāʾ* is that in which God 'introduces the forms of the bodies of the cosmos' (*ajsām al-ʻālam*) (Ibn ʻArabī n.d., vol. 2, p. 130). It is thus the matter to which the forms of existents combine. He goes on to assert that the *habāʾ* was

> the first thing through the existence of which darkness was manifest, so it is a dark substance (*jawhar muẓlim*) in which transparent bodies (*ajsām shaffāfa*) and other things were manifest. So every darkness in the cosmos is from the substance (*jawhar*) of the *habāʾ*, which is prime matter (*hayūlā*) (Ibn ʻArabī n.d., vol. 2, pp. 647–48).

The first differentiation of the divine in creation is the *habāʾ*, which is the substance and prime matter that combines with all forms in the cosmos and creates hylomorphic compounds. This passage demonstrates again that Ibn ʻArabī uses the terms 'substance' (*jawhar*) and 'prime matter' (*hayūlā*) interchangeably. He explains that even this dark substance that is the basis of hylomorphic compounds, particularly in the physical world, is still predicated on, and accepts, divine light (*nūr ilāhī*). In fact, it is constituted from divine light; therefore, even darkness is based on light, and all things in the cosmos are from the light of God. He writes that the basis (*aṣl*) of natural bodies (*ajsām ṭabīʿiyya*)

> is from light. This is why if humankind knows how all the dense (*kathīfa*), dark (*ẓulmāniyya*) bodies become pure, and are made transparent with light—which is its source—like glass when it is pure from dirt and sand, and becomes transparent, . . . [they would realize] that this is only because the source of all existents is God, and His Name, '*Light of the heavens* (which is what is above) *and the earth* (which is what is below) (Ibn ʻArabī n.d., vol. 2, p. 647).

All hylomorphic compounds in the sensible world are 'dense' (*kathīf*) and perceptible to the senses, as opposed to the 'subtle' (*laṭīf*) existents of the pre-sensible worlds (Powers 2004, p. 441). Ibn 'Arabī explicates that even the dense and turbid hylomorphic compounds of the sensible world are still based on divine light in the same way as clear glass is created when dense and unclear sand is removed. The *habā'*, therefore, is the prime matter or the dark substance that accepts the forms of hylomorphic compounds in the sensible world, but is itself based on divine light. Ibn 'Arabī's exposition of the source of *habā'* is, yet again, Qur'anic as he predicates it on the famous Light Verse (Q24:35), in which God is described as '*the Light of the heavens and the earth*'. This means that the Aristotelian terms of prime matter and substance are converted to the Qur'anic term of *habā'*, which comes from the Qur'anic notion of God as the light of the heavens and the earth.

6. Conclusions

Ibn 'Arabī accepts Aristotelian hylomorphism. He agrees that all primary substances in the world are hylomorphic compounds of matter and form in which matter ultimately comes from prime matter, or *hayūlā*. He parts ways with Aristotle when he identifies prime matter with substance, or *jawhar*. Nevertheless, it is in his thoroughgoing theologization of hylomorphism that he displays greatest independence from Aristotle. Ibn 'Arabī asserts that the divine substance is the cause and starting point of all existence. Prime matter, which is used interchangeably with substance, is the divine substrate that represents the potentiality of all things, and this potentiality is actualized if it combines with the forms of God's Names. The stimulus for the forms of the divine Names to combine with divine prime matter is the breath of the Compassionate. The result of this divine breath of existentiation pervading divine prime matter is the 'cloud' that is mentioned in prophetic traditions. This cloud is the first recipient of the divine mercy of existentiation, or the product of God's desire to see His Names manifested in creation. This happens at all levels of existence. However, when it comes to the perceptible world, prime matter and substance is referred to Ibn 'Arabī by the Qur'anic term of 'dust' (*habā'*). It is this 'dust' that combines with all forms to create the hylomorphic compounds that are manifestations of the divine.

The foregoing demonstrates that Ibn 'Arabī carries out a complete theologization of Aristotle's concepts and ideas, and articulates them using concepts and terms from the Qur'an and prophetic traditions. While he disagrees with Aristotle on issues like the independence and separability of prime matter, it is in his complete theological reformulation and its articulation in Qur'anic and *ḥadīth*-derived nomenclature that he truly showcases his originality.

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On Proofs for the Existence of God: Aristotle, Avicenna, and Thomas Aquinas

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Abstract: In this paper, I examine Aristotle's cosmological proof of God's existence, Avicenna's metaphysical proof, and Thomas Aquinas's five-way proof. By comparing these proofs, I argue that philosophers and theologians take different approaches to proving God's existence not only because they follow different epistemological principles but, more fundamentally, because they construct different metaphysical frameworks in which God as the Supreme Being plays different roles and is thus clarified differently. The proof of God's existence is also of theological significance. This paper makes an original contribution by showing that, despite Avicenna's harsh criticism, Aquinas returns to Aristotelian cosmological proof. Moreover, Aquinas goes beyond Aristotle by identifying God not only as the First Mover but also as the Creator. The theme of God's existence bridges philosophy and theology, and it also clearly reflects the interplay and mutual influence of Greek philosophy, Arabic Aristotelianism, and Latin Scholastics.

Keywords: Aristotle; Avicenna; Thomas Aquinas; God; existence; essence; causality; modality

1. Introduction

In this paper, I examine the three proofs of God's existence proposed by Aristotle, Avicenna, and Thomas Aquinas. By reconstructing and analyzing the arguments, I aim to show that proving God's existence is both a philosophical and a theological issue. I argue that philosophers and theologians take different approaches to proving God's existence not only because they follow different epistemological principles but, more fundamentally, because they construct different metaphysical frameworks in which God, the Supreme Being, plays different roles and is thus clarified differently. Moreover, the proof of God's existence is of theological significance. As a theologian, Aquinas abandons Avicenna's metaphysical proof and restores the Aristotelian cosmological proof for theological reasons.

I begin with Aristotle's cosmological proof (Section 2). I argue that Aristotle constructs this cosmological proof, which proceeds from the moved heavenly bodies to God as the First Mover, by following the epistemological principle that proceeds from the sensible to the intelligible. More fundamentally, Aristotle's cosmological proof is constructed within his metaphysical framework of ousiology and aitiology. Specifically, Aristotle's cosmological proof establishes a paradigm for deducing God by argument, inferring cause from effect. Consequently, the later Peripatetics, in discussing related issues, had to target this Aristotelian paradigm, as seen in Avicenna's criticism of it and Aquinas's adherence to it. I then present Avicenna's metaphysical proof (Section 3). I argue that Avicenna constructs this metaphysical proof while criticizing Aristotle's cosmological proof because he not only modifies Aristotle's epistemological principle into the epistemological principle of deduction but, more fundamentally, reconstructs the discipline of metaphysics in a new, syllogistic way. I emphasize that Avicenna constructs his metaphysical proof in the same syllogistic way that he reconstructs metaphysics. Through syllogism, Avicenna establishes a metaphysical proof, which proceeds not from effect to cause, as Aristotle's cosmological proof does, but rather from the universal to the particular. Accordingly, Avicenna deduces God as a special kind of existence, that is, the necessary existence in itself, from universal

existence. Next, I turn to an examination of Aquinas's five-way proof (Section 4). Taking the five-way proof as a whole, I offer a unified interpretation. I argue that, despite Avicenna's harsh criticism, Aquinas returns to the cosmological proof that proceeds from effect to cause not only because he restores the Aristotelian epistemological principle that proceeds from the sensible to the intelligible but also because causality, or more precisely the causal relationship in the creationist sense between the creatures and the Creator, plays a key role in his metaphysical considerations. Just as Aristotle deduces God as the First Mover from the moved heavenly bodies, so Aquinas constructs a five-way proof to deduce God as the Creator from the creatures, whereby the Creator appears either as the First Mover, or the necessary existence in itself, or as the efficient, final, or existential cause of all things. Aquinas also appeals to the cosmological proof for theological reasons. Consistent with Aquinas's cosmological proof, natural theology holds that human beings have the capacity to know God through natural reason.

In conclusion, I show that Aristotle's cosmological proof, Avicenna's metaphysical proof, and Aquinas's five-way proof differ from each other because of their different epistemological principles, different metaphysical constructions, and particular theological intentions. Finally, I explain that philosophers and theologians who are dedicated to proving God's existence primarily aim not to prove God's existence, which they do not question at all, but to clarify the nature or essence of God, given the unification of God's existence and His essence. Through these proofs of God's existence, we finally arrive at the essence of God.

2. Aristotle's Cosmological Proof for the First Mover

To present Aristotle's cosmological proof, I begin by clarifying the metaphysical framework of Aristotle, within which the cosmological proof is unfolded. In *Metaph*. Γ1, Aristotle declares that "there is a science, (i.e., metaphysics) which investigates being qua being and the per se properties" (Ἔστιν ἐπιστήμη τις ἣ θεωρεῖ τὸ ὂν ᾗ ὂν καὶ τὰ τούτῳ ὑπάρχοντα καθ' αὑτό, 1003a21-22). Next, Aristotle explains that although being is said in multiple senses, all of these senses point to one focal meaning, namely, substance (οὐσία).[1] Insofar as Aristotle's metaphysics studies being qua being in the sense of ousia, it is called ousiology. From the beginning, Aristotle recognizes two kinds of substances, sensible and intelligible.[2] A sensible substance is combined with matter and is movable; an intelligible substance is separated from matter and is immovable. Aristotle argues that if there were nothing other than sensible substance, then physics, which studies sensible substance, would be the first philosophy.[3] Since physics is not the first philosophy but theology is, the subject of theology, the intelligible substance, is a kind of substance that is different from sensible substance.[4] Moreover, Aristotle emphrasizes that there must be two kinds of substances, mainly because sensible and intelligible substances do not have a common origin.[5] There are two different kinds of substances: sensible and intelligible. Among the sensible substances, some are natural things that are generated and corrupted in the sublunar world, and others are heavenly bodies that are constantly moved throughout the universe. Therefore, Aristotle recognizes a total of three kinds of substances. In *Metaph*. Λ1, 1069a30-36, Aristotle summarizes the three kinds of substances by characterizing each of them as having two different and compatible attributes, one of them being sensible and perishable, another being sensible and imperishable, and the third being intelligible and immovable. Accordingly, Aristotle regards natural things, such as human beings, animals, and plants, as sensible and perishable substances; heavenly bodies as sensible and imperishable substances; and God as an intelligent and immovable substance.[6] Thus, Aristotle's ousiology examines a total of three kinds of substances: natural entities, heavenly bodies, and God. From these three kinds of substances, Aristotle further deduces two kinds of causes; accordingly, metaphysics shifts its form from ousiology to aitiology.[7] In my view, Aristotle's aitiology includes cosmological proof and the doctrine of the four causes. On the one hand, Aristotle grasps the four causes, i.e., material, formal, efficient, and final causes, by examining how a natural thing is generated and moved. On the other hand, he

introduces God as the First Mover by examining the ultimate efficient cause of the motion of the heavenly bodies. When we do not limit ourselves to the content of *Metaphysics* (especially the Book Γ) but look at Aristotle's works on physics such as *Physics*, *On the Heavens*, and *On Generation and Corruption* in a comprehensive way, the basic structure of Aristotle's metaphysics takes its full form: it appears either in the form of ousiology, which investigates three kinds of substances (natural things, heavenly bodies, and God), or in the form of aitiology, which investigates two kinds of causes (the four causes of the generation and motion of natural things, and the ultimate efficient cause of the motion of heavenly bodies).[8] Within the metaphysical framework of aitiology and ousiology, Aristotle constructs cosmological proof of God's existence, which deals with the causal relationship between two kinds of substances, that is, how the heavenly bodies are causally related to God.

Furthermore, I draw attention to the epistemological principle established by Aristotle, which forms the epistemological basis for his cosmological proof. According to Aristotle's epistemological principle, our cognitive activity should start from what is clearer and more knowable to us and eventually arrive at what is clearer and more knowable by nature (πέφυκε δὲ ἐκ τῶν γνωριμωτέρων ἡμῖν ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ σαφεστέρων ἐπὶ τὰ σαφέστερα τῇ φύσει καὶ γνωριμώτερα, *Phys*. A1, 184a16-18).[9] In other words, our cognitive activity should proceed from what is prior to us to what is prior by nature. For Aristotle, what is prior to us refers to what is prior to sensation, that is, sensible substances, which include natural things and heavenly bodies. To prove the existence of God, Aristotle starts not from natural things but from heavenly bodies because, in his view, only heavenly bodies in the universe have a direct relationship with God.

Based on what Aristotle proves in *Metaph*. Λ6-8 and *Phys*. Θ5, I reconstruct Aristotle's cosmological proof as follows. Having accepted the astronomical findings of his time, Aristotle believes that there are fifty-five heavenly bodies in the universe.[10] Aristotle also establishes an important principle, namely, that what is moved must be moved by something (ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸ κινούμενον ἀνάγκη ὑπό τινος κινεῖσθαι, *Metaph*. Λ8, 1073a26).[11] On this basis, Aristotle states that among these heavenly bodies, A is moved by B, B is moved by C, and C is moved by D. However, this would lead to an infinite regress, which Aristotle does not recognize. Because of the limited number of heavenly bodies, the chain of moving and being moved among them cannot enter infinite regression. In addition, Aristotle's universe does not allow for infinity because, in his view, the universe is finite, bounded, and cannot expand infinitely, in contrast to the Big Bang theory of recent scientific cosmologists, according to which the universe has no boundaries and is still expanding. In the case of an Aristotelian finite universe and a finite number of heavenly bodies, one can either recognize the last two heavenly bodies interacting or establish a heterogeneous first mover to end this infinite regression. Aristotle does not recognize the interaction between the heavenly bodies[12] but believes that there must be a first mover that moves the heavenly bodies without being moved by anything else.[13] Given the prohibition of infinite regression, Aristotle thus deduces God as the First Mover from the moved heavenly bodies.

In what follows, I examine the argument by arguing that to be valid, Aristotle's cosmological proof must satisfy two assumptions, one of which is the aforementioned prohibition of infinite regress, and the other is that the heavenly bodies must be purely material entities. The second assumption does not contradict the findings of modern science but was difficult for the ancients to accept; after all, the ancients believed that the heavenly bodies had souls, as seen in Alexander's (1891) commentary on *Metaph*. Λ8.[14] However, if the heavenly bodies were a combination of a cosmic soul and a cosmic body, they would be able to move on their own, just like a human being as a combination of a soul and a body, without the need for an external mover, and the entire cosmological proof would be invalidated.[15] Therefore, the heavenly bodies must be material entities that are generally incapable of actively moving themselves (οὐ γὰρ ἥ γε ὕλη κινήσει αὐτὴ ἑαυτήν, *Metaph*. Λ6, 1071b29-30). Just as a material entity, such as a table, cannot propel itself into motion, so too the heavenly bodies, as material entities, cannot propel themselves into motion;

thus, they need an external propeller or mover. This mover moves the heavenly bodies without being moved by anything else, so it is the Unmoved Mover (τοίνυν ἔστι τι ὃ οὐ κινούμενον κινεῖ, *Metaph*. Λ7, 1072a24-26). Since the Unmoved Mover is the ultimate efficient cause of the motion of the heavenly bodies, Aristotle calls Him the First Mover (τὸ πρῶτον κινοῦν).[16] Moreover, the First Mover can ultimately end the chain of moving and being moved only if it is essentially different from the moved heavenly bodies. If the First Mover contained matter that cannot move itself, then the First Mover would still need an efficient cause and thus fall back into an infinite regress. Therefore, the First Mover and the moved heavenly bodies must be heterogeneous, just as the person who pushes a chain of dominoes is essentially different from the dominoes that are pushed. Since the heavenly bodies are purely material entities, the First Mover must be a purely intelligent entity, that is, God.[17] Through his cosmological proof, Aristotle not only proves that God is the First Mover but also concludes that God, as the First Mover, must be a purely intelligent substance, a conclusion consistent with his original presupposition of God. According to Aristotle, God, as an intelligent substance, actualizes itself by thinking of itself eternally and continuously (ἔστιν ἡ νόησις νοήσεως νόησις, *Metaph*. Λ9, 1074b33-35).[18] Through eternal and continuous self-realization (actus purus, ἡ ἁπλῆ καὶ κατ' ἐνέργειαν, *Metaph*. Λ7, 1072a31-32), God directly drives the motion of the heavenly bodies and indirectly influences the birth and death of natural things, thus playing the role of the ultimate efficient cause of the universe and the sublunar world.[19]

In sum, Aristotle constructs the cosmological proof that proceeds from the moved heavenly bodies to God as the First Mover not only because he follows the epistemological principle that proceeds from the sensible to the intelligible but more fundamentally because causality, specifically the causal relationship in the sense of moving and being moved between God and the heavenly bodies, plays a crucial role in Aristotle's metaphysical framework of ousiology and aitiology. Crucially, Aristotle's cosmological proof establishes a paradigm for deducing God by argument, inferring cause from effect. Consequently, the later Peripatetics, in discussing related issues, had to target this Aristotelian paradigm, as seen in Avicenna's criticism of it and Aquinas's adherence to it.

3. Avicenna's Metaphysical Proof for Necessary Existence in Itself

Regarding Avicenna's proof of God's existence, scholars have mainly debated two related questions: Where can this proof be found and what is its nature? Regarding the first question, I argue that Avicenna demonstrates God's existence in the *Metaphysics of the Healing* (*al-Šifāʾ: Ilāhīyyāt*, abbreviated as *Ilāhīyyāt*), following Menn (2013), who claims that there is proof of God's existence "briefly in (*Ilāhīyyāt*) I.6-7 and more fully in Book VIII" (2013, p. 149, n. 14).[20] In my view, a few relevant passages scattered throughout *Ilāhīyyāt* I.2, I.5-7, and VIII.1-3 constitute the entire proof, with each of these passages playing a different role in the construction of the proof. Regarding the nature of Avicenna's proof,[21] I agree with Mayer, who sees Avicenna's proof as both metaphysical (in his words, "ontological")[22] and cosmological (2001, pp. 35–39). While Mayer focuses on the proof Avicenna proposes in *Najāt* and *Ishārāt*, I argue that in *Ilāhīyyāt* (I.2, I.5-7, VIII.1-3), Avicenna uses syllogism to prove God's existence by deducing God, who has a special existence, from the universal concept of existence. In my interpretation, Avicenna's proof proceeds from the universal to the particular, so it does not follow the Aristotelian pattern of cosmological proof, which proceeds from effect to cause. Thus, Avicenna's proof is not cosmological but rather metaphysical. In what follows, I show how Avicenna provides a metaphysical proof for the existence of God in *Ilāhīyyāt*, beginning with Avicenna's critique of Aristotle's cosmological proof.

In the commentary on Aristotle's *Metaph*. Λ7, Avicenna criticizes Aristotle's cosmological proof by claiming that even if the argument were valid, it would not prove a cause for the existence of the heavenly bodies but merely identify God, whom Avicenna calls, in this context, "the First Real", "the One", "the Real", or "the First Principle", with the efficient cause of the motion of the heavenly bodies. From Aristotle's identification of God with

the ultimate efficient cause of the motion of the heavenly bodies, according to Avicenna, Aristotle cannot necessarily take this efficient cause (mabdaʾ li-haraka = causa efficiens) to be an existential cause of the heavenly bodies (mabdaʾ li-ḏuwāt/mabdaʾ li-mauǧūd = causa essendi).[23] The existential cause is related to the question of how the heavenly bodies come into being, while the efficient cause is related to the question of how the heavenly bodies are constantly moved. Efficient cause and existential cause are different things. Thus, in Avicenna's view, Aristotle's cosmological proof at most proves that there is a heterogeneous First Mover as the efficient cause beyond the heavenly bodies, but it does not prove God as the existential cause of the heavenly bodies and all other things. Moreover, Avicenna might criticize that the cosmological proof, which proceeds from effect to cause, lacks necessity. For example, if we see water on the road, it does not necessarily follow that this is the result of rain from the sky because there are many other causes that could lead to the same result. Similarly, even if a causal relationship of moving and being moved is recognized between God and the heavenly bodies, it is not necessary to infer God from the heavenly bodies, and the causal relationship is only somewhat contingent.[24] Gutas alludes to this criticism by quoting a passage from an older contemporary of Avicenna named Abū-Sulaymān as-Sijistānī as follows (2014, pp. 297–98):

> The most appropriate inquiry concerning the first mover is that in which discussion of Physical Theory is combined with Metaphysical theory. [. . .] Let us then state in what way this is so. Inquiry concerning the conjunction of effects with causes has two aspects; the first, insofar as it ascends through the connection of one to the other to their causes; and the second, insofar as the permeation of the power of the cause in its effects [is considered]. Inquiry in the first mode belongs to the Physicist, and in the second mode to the Metaphysician [i.e., qua student of Universe Science]. There exists also a third mode unconcerned with relation, namely, inquiry into the essence apart from affinities and relationships. The discussion belongs to the Theologian.

In this passage, Abū-Sulaymān mentions three ways to reach God. One is a physical approach, another is a metaphysical approach, and the third is a theological approach. In Abū-Sulaymān's view, with which Avicenna agrees, Aristotle's cosmological proof takes the physical approach of inferring cause from effect. While the physical approach of inferring cause from effect lacks necessity, as mentioned above, the metaphysical approach of inferring effect from cause has necessity. In my opinion, Avicenna adopts a metaphysical approach with some modifications. He modifies the metaphysical approach of inferring effect from cause proposed by Abū-Sulaymān into his own version of inferring the particular from the universal, which also guarantees the necessity of deduction. By emphasizing necessity, Avicenna favors the metaphysical approach over the physical approach, thereby replacing Aristotle's cosmological proof with a metaphysical proof. While the physical and metaphysical approaches deal with the relationship between cause and effect, the theological approach stands apart from causal relationships and affinities and instead requires an exploration of the nature of God Himself. The theological approach described here refers to negative theology, according to which God remains beyond causal relations and can be expressed only in negative terms. I agree with Gutas that Avicenna abandons the Aristotelian physical approach in proving the existence of God. However, I disagree with his claim that Avicenna "establishes the First Real by means of the theological way" (Gutas 2014, p. 299) because the latter does not take a theological approach in the sense of negative theology but rather a metaphysical approach, which necessarily derives God, the particular Supreme Being, from the universal being.

Moreover, Gutas aptly notes that "Avicenna's criticism of Aristotle's proof of the First Mover by means of motion and his concomitant theory of Necessary Existence are among the most important aspects of this metaphysical system" (2014, pp. 299–300). In this way, Gutas suggests that Avicenna establishes a metaphysical proof while criticizing Aristotle's cosmological proof not only because Aristotle's arguments lack necessity but also because Avicenna reconstructs the entire metaphysical framework to such an extent that God within it must be explored in a different way. I elaborate on this point below.

In the reconstruction of metaphysics, Avicenna made a twofold effort to redefine the subject and method of this discipline. As Bertolacci has clearly and aptly noted, Avicenna distinguishes between the subject (mawḍūʿ = ὑποκείμενον) and the goal (ğaraḍ = τέλος) of metaphysics; on this basis, he argues that God cannot be the subject of metaphysics, only its goal (2006, pp. 111–31). In the *Analytics Posterior*, Aristotle establishes the scientific principle that a discipline cannot prove its own subject and that the subject must be posited as something self-evident to that disciple, and he applies it to scientific disciplines such as arithmetic and geometry.[25] Arithmetic cannot by itself prove the existence of numbers and their essential properties, such as oddness and evenness. Geometry cannot by itself prove the existence and properties of lines, surfaces, and solids; moreover, axioms must be established within geometry and used as self-evident premises. Avicenna applies this scientific principle of Aristotle to metaphysics. Accordingly, metaphysics cannot by itself prove the existence of its subject but must take a self-evident subject as the starting point. God's existence is not self-evident but must be proven, so God cannot be regarded as the subject of metaphysics, only as its goal. Although God is not self-evident, there are some things that are self-evident, which Avicenna calls the Firsts. To redefine "first", which Aristotle defines as a first-class being, i.e., a purely intelligent being, or the first mover, i.e., the ultimate efficient cause, Avicenna modifies Aristotle's epistemological principle. According to Aristotle, our cognitive activity should proceed from what is prior to us to what is prior by nature. By what is prior to us, Aristotle means what is prior to sensation, i.e., the sensible and particular, while Avicenna means what is prior to human intellect, i.e., the intelligible and universal, by asserting in *Ilāhīyyāt* I.5 that "the concepts (maʿnā) of 'existent', 'thing', and 'necessary' are impressed upon the soul as a primary impression; this impression does not need to be obtained from better-known things."[26] Avicenna reinterprets Aristotle's epistemological principle by identifying the firsts with intelligible and universal concepts, such as existent (mawjūd = ens), thing (šayʾ = res), one (wāḥid = unum), and necessity (ḍarūrī = necessitas).[27] These universal concepts are the first encountered by human intellect and are therefore self-evident; thus, they should be the subject of metaphysics. Metaphysics should investigate universal concepts in general and the existent in particular, as Avicenna emphasizes in *Ilāhīyyāt* I.2 as follows.

> The primary subject of this science (i.e., metaphysics) is the existent insofar as it is an existent, and what is (also)sought in this science are the things that accompany the existent insofar as it is an existent unconditionally (*Ilāhīyyāt* I.2, p. 10, lines 3–6, translation by Marmura with slight modification).

In order to explain exactly the aforementioned things that unconditionally accompany the existent qua existent, Avicenna distinguishes two cases. In the first case, just as a genus is divided into species, existent, which is equivalent to being in this context, can be divided into categories such as substance, quantity, and quality (*Ilāhīyyāt* I.2, p. 10, lines 7–8). The categorical division of being into substance, quantity, and quality is accompanied by the specification of being physical, mathematical, or moral. Although categories accompany being, being is no longer universal insofar as it is unconditioned being. Thus, categories are not what metaphysics should be looking for. Rather, metaphysics should look for properties per se that do not specify being as physical, mathematical, or moral, as Avicenna mentions below.

> Some of these things (sought in metaphysics) are similar to the properties per se (al-ʿawāriḍ al-ḫāṣa), such as the one and the many, potency and actualization, the universal and the particular, and the possible and the necessary. For the existent, in accepting these properties and in being prepared for them, does not need to be specified as physical, mathematical, moral, or any other (*Ilāhīyyāt* I.2, p. 10, lines 11–16, translation by Marmura with slight modification).

Thus, according to Avicenna, metaphysics should investigate the existent qua existent and the properties per se that unconditionally accompany the existent. These disjunctive essential properties include one–many, potency–actualization, universal–particular, and possible–necessary. Avicenna is obviously constructing metaphysics as an ontology, i.e.,

metaphysica generalis.[28] Avicenna's dictum seems to bear a great resemblance to Aristotle's statement that "there is a science (i.e., metaphysics) which investigates being qua being and the properties per se" (Ἔστιν ἐπιστήμη τις ᾗ θεωρεῖ τὸ ὂν ᾗ ὂν καὶ τὰ τούτῳ ὑπάρχοντα καθ' αὑτό, *Metaph*. Γ1, 1003a21-22). Nevertheless, in *Metaph*. Γ1-3, Aristotle clearly relates being qua being with principle or substance. Moreover, in *Metaph*. Z13, Aristotle explicitly rejects the universal as substance (ἔοικε γὰρ ἀδύνατον εἶναι οὐσίαν εἶναι ὁτιοῦν τῶν καθόλου λεγομένων, 1038b8-9), thereby criticizing the two kinds of universals, i.e., Platonic ideas and Pythagorean numbers, as substances in *Metaph*. Z14 and Z16 and in the last two books, M and N. Therefore, it is impossible for Aristotle to investigate being qua being in the universal, unconditioned sense or to establish a metaphysica generalis. The establishment of a metaphysica generalis is the result of Avicenna's significant reworking and modification of Aristotle's metaphysics, which in turn influences Aquinas's view of Aristotelian metaphysics and his own construction of metaphysics.[29]

In order to reconstruct metaphysics as a universal science, Avicenna also redefines the method of this discipline by adopting and modifying Aristotle's scientific method, syllogism. Following Aristotle, who uses the syllogistic method to construct scientific disciplines such as arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy in the *Analytics Posterior*, Avicenna shows that metaphysics, like other scientific disciplines, should be constructed using syllogism.[30] As mentioned above, Avicenna asserts in *Ilāhīyyāt* I.5 (p. 22, lines 19–20) that the concepts of "existent", "thing", and "necessary" are impressed upon the soul as a primary impression. This impression is primary in the sense that these universal, self-evident concepts cannot be obtained through less universal, less self-evident concepts. Conversely, less universal concepts should be inferred from universal concepts, just as a particular proposition is inferred from the universal proposition that functions as the major premise (which Avicenna calls the "first principle") of the demonstration and that is true in itself (*Ilāhīyyāt* I.5, p. 22, lines 20–24). Just as the particular true proposition "Socrates is mortal" is validly deduced from the universally true proposition "All men are mortal" (through the transition of the middle term "Socrates is a man"), so too can a particular concept be deduced from a universal concept. On this basis, I propose that Avicenna uses the modified syllogism to provide a metaphysical proof of God's existence.

Avicenna begins with the existent qua existent, i.e., the universal, self-evident concept of the existent (*Ilāhīyyāt* I.2, I.5). He then mentions that "the things that come into existence can be dichotomously divided in the mind" into the necessary existent and the possible existent (*Ilāhīyyāt* I.6, pp. 29–30). When the possible existent is considered by itself, its existence is neither necessary nor impossible (*Ilāhīyyāt* I.6, p. 30, lines 1–5). When the necessary existent is considered by itself, its existence is necessary (*Ilāhīyyāt* I.6, p. 30, lines 5–6); in other words, its nonexistence is impossible and inconceivable. More precisely, the dichotomy appears to be possible existent in itself and necessary existent in itself. Avicenna then argues that the necessary existent in itself differs from the necessary existent through another because the existence of the latter has a cause and depends on the cause and that of the former has no cause, being independent of anything else (*Ilāhīyyāt* I.6, p. 30, lines 7–31). In *Ilāhīyyāt* I.6, Avicenna actually divides existence into three kinds, namely, the possible existent in itself, the necessary existent through another, and the necessary existent in itself. Many scholars have drawn attention to this crucial threefold division of existence and given different interpretations. On the basis of careful textual analysis, Bertolacci has reconstructed this division as a diairesis, so that existence is divided into the pair necessary–possible, and these two, i.e., necessary existent and possible existent, are subdivided into the pair in itself–by another, respectively.[31] On the other hand, Wisnovsky describes Avicenna's division as the matrix of distinctions, in which existence is divided into pairs such as necessary–possible, in itself–through another, and uncaused–caused (Wisnovsky 2003, pp. 197–263; De Haan 2020, pp. 150–79). Following Wisnovsky, I propose that Avicenna constructs a matrix in such a way that he divides existence from different perspectives, differentiating existence in parallel into necessary–possible with respect to the mode of being, in itself–through another with respect to the origin of necessity, uncaused–caused

with respect to whether the existent has a cause, and simplicity–multiplicity with respect to whether the existent is simple or composed (Wisnovsky 2003, pp. 197–98, 248, 260–63; De Haan 2020, p. 172). Since the distinctions that Avicenna constructs are not ordered in a vertical, hierarchical way but are arranged in parallel, Avicenna does not perform a diairesis (as Bertolacci assumes) but rather constructs a matrix (as Wisnovsky identifies). On this basis, I suggest that Avicenna does not stop at the matrix of distinctions but rather goes on to construct a cross-division.[32] In my opinion, Avicenna divides existence in parallel into necessary–possible and in itself–through another. These two pairs are cross-combined with each other, thus establishing four combinations that characterize four kinds of existents, namely, necessary existent in itself, necessary existent through another, possible existent in itself, and possible existent through another. The possible existent through another, that is, the existent that derives its possibility from another, is not actually possible in reality, so Avicenna omits this kind of existent and focuses on the first three kinds of existents. Avicenna further equates possible existents in themselves with necessary existents through another because possible existents can only come into existence through the other existents of a higher rank, i.e., necessary existents. In other words, beings exist by themselves only in a possible way, but they exist in reality, so their actual existence must be achieved through a necessary other. Among the necessary existents through another, one derives its necessity from another, this other derives its necessity from another, and in this way, the process goes on for infinity. However, the chain of necessary existents deriving their necessity from another cannot go on for infinity, so Avicenna concludes that to end this chain, there must be the necessary existent that derives its necessity from itself, that is, God (*Ilāhīyyāt* I.6, p. 31, line 27-p. 32, line 6). God, as necessary existent in itself, is essentially different from necessary existent through another (*Ilāhīyyāt* I.7, p. 35, lines 14–20). Whereas the necessary existent through another is caused and composite, God is uncaused and simple, completely isolated from potentiality and possibility (*Ilāhīyyāt* I.7, p. 38, lines 7–21).

As Davidson (1987, pp. 298–99) and Bertolacci (2006, p. 224) have rightly pointed out, Avicenna does not construct a metaphysical proof that proceeds from cause to effect because God is not self-evident and cannot be taken as the starting point of the proof. Nevertheless, nothing prevents Avicenna from constructing a metaphysical proof that proceeds from the universal to the particular. The proof of God's existence is the process by which humankind comes to know God. Humankind can reach God as a particular existent only through the universal existent, which, according to Avicenna, is self-evident to the human intellect. The crucial point is that the process of knowing God does not compromise the universality of God Himself. Thus, I propose that Avicenna constructs a metaphysical proof using a syllogism in which the universal, self-evident concept of existence is established as the major premise (*Ilāhīyyāt* I.2, I.5). To establish the middle term, Avicenna divides existence into three kinds and reduces them to two kinds by equating the possible existent in itself with the necessary existent through another (*Ilāhīyyāt* I.6). Since the chain of necessary existents through another cannot go on for infinity, necessary existents through another must ultimately be attributed to the necessary existent in itself (*Ilāhīyyāt* I.6-7). Thus, Avicenna concludes that God exists by syllogistically inferring God as the special existent, i.e., the necessary existent in itself, from the universal existent, i.e., the existent qua existent. Avicenna anticipates the conclusion in *Ilāhīyyāt* I.6-7, which is fully articulated in VIII.1-3. Avicenna's proof follows the syllogistic pattern of inferring the particular from the universal, which is inconsistent with Aristotle's cosmological proof of inferring cause from effect, so that Avicenna's proof as a whole is not cosmological but rather metaphysical. Nevertheless, Avicenna's metaphysical proof has elements of cosmological proof since Avicenna establishes a certain causal relationship between two kinds of necessary existents and rejects infinite progression (Davidson 1987, p. 180).

In summary, Avicenna constructs a metaphysical proof while directing his criticism at Aristotle's cosmological proof because he modifies Aristotle's epistemological principle of proceeding from the sensible to the intelligible into the epistemological principle of deduction from the universal to the particular. More fundamentally, Avicenna rejects Aristotle's

way of constructing metaphysics as ousiology and aitiology and reconstructs this discipline as ontology, i.e., metaphysica generalis.[33] To this end, he defines the subject of metaphysics as universal existence and establishes the method of this discipline as syllogism. Crucially, Avicenna's twofold modification of metaphysics, that is, the redefinition of the subject and the method, are interrelated to form his metaphysical proof of God's existence. Avicenna constructs metaphysics by means of syllogism, so that metaphysicians should start from the subject of metaphysics, i.e., universal existence, and arrive at the goal of this discipline, i.e., God's existence.[34] Accordingly, Avicenna establishes a metaphysical proof in a similar syllogistic manner so that one proceeds from universal existence to special existence, i.e., God as the necessary existent in itself. Thus, Avicenna's establishment of the metaphysical proof of God's existence is closely related to his reconstruction of metaphysics.

4. Thomas Aquinas's Cosmological Proof for the Existence of God

As analyzed, Avicenna criticizes Aristotle's cosmological proof because the Aristotelian way of inferring cause from effect lacks necessity. Thus, Avicenna constructs a metaphysical proof using syllogism, which necessarily infers the particular from the universal. Accordingly, Avicenna constructs a metaphysical proof in such a syllogistic way that he deduces God as the special existent from the universal existent. Although Aquinas does not explicitly mention Avicenna in his proof of God's existence, it is possible to reproduce Aquinas's criticism of Avicenna based on his philosophical principles. Aquinas might think that Avicenna's syllogistic method, while having necessity, derives only the particular concept of God, i.e., "the necessary existent in itself", from the universal concept of "existent" and does not prove the real existence of God. Aquinas believes that God's existence cannot be inferred from any concept but rather from only some other existence; therefore, he abandons Avicenna's metaphysical proof by the concept of the existent and returns to Aristotle's cosmological proof by causality. Aquinas thus follows the Aristotelian pattern of inferring cause from effect in the five-way proof. In what follows, I examine the five-way proof presented in *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3, focusing mainly on the first three ways, which are essentially associated with Aristotle's cosmological proof and Avicenna's metaphysical proof.

The first way is based on motion. Although it is closest to Aristotle's cosmological proof, Aquinas's first way does not start from the motion of heavenly bodies in the universe but rather from the motion of natural bodies in the sublunar world. I reconstruct the argument in the following four steps. (1) By means of sense perception, we observe that some things are moved in the sublunar world. (2) Whatever is moved is moved by something else. (2.1) To move is to bring something from potentiality to actuality; moreover, a thing can be brought from potentiality to actuality only by another thing that is in actuality. For example, fire, which is actually hot, makes wood, which is potentially hot, actually hot, so fire moves and changes wood. (2.2) However, it is impossible for the same thing to be both actual and potential at the same time and in the same way, as what is actually hot cannot be potentially hot at the same time but can be potentially cold at the same time. (2.3) It is therefore impossible for something to be both mover and moved in the same respect and in the same way or for it to move itself. Therefore, whatever is moved must be moved by something else. (3) Furthermore, this something else, if it is moved, must itself be moved by something else, and that something else by yet another thing. In this way, the chain of moving and being moved would go on for infinity. However, this chain cannot go on for infinity because if there were no first mover, then there would be no other movers. The second movers can move something only if they are moved by a first mover, just as a stick can move only if it is moved by a hand. (4) Therefore, it is necessary to have as the first mover something that is not moved by anything, that is, God.

Regarding the first way, scholars debate whether Aquinas uses movetur in the intransitive sense of "in motion" or in the passive sense of "being moved".[35] I prefer the latter reading and believe that Aquinas consistently uses movetur in the passive sense. For Aquinas states that "whatever is moved must be moved by something else" (omne ergo

quod movetur, oportet ab alio moveri) by imitating the principle established by Aristotle in the cosmological proof that "whatever is moved must be moved by something" (ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸ κινούμενον ἀνάγκη ὑπό τινος κινεῖσθαι, *Metaph.* Λ8, 1073a26). From the Greek original, it is clear that movetur, like κινεῖσθαι, is used in the passive sense.[36] After asserting that things are moved in the sublunar world (1), Aquinas turns to explaining two premises of the argument that play a crucial role in constructing the first way. Aquinas is so aware of the importance of these two premises that he provides a defense of them in *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, c.13. The first premise is that whatever is moved must be moved by something else, as stated in (2) and proven by (2.1)–(2.3). The second premise is the prohibition of infinite regress, stated in (3). As scholars have noted, there are many problems with these premises, which I will not repeat. What I am questioning is the first premise, in which one cannot derive (2.3) from (2.2). In my view, Aquinas confuses two sets of concepts here by substituting the non-coexistence of potentiality and actuality (2.2) for the non-coexistence of moving and being moved (2.3). It is true that potentiality and actuality cannot coexist simultaneously, but moving and being moved can coexist simultaneously; e.g., according to Aristotle, all living things (such as plants, animals, and humans) and God can move themselves (Shields and Pasnau 2016, p. 110).[37] Although one cannot derive the non-coexistence of moving and being moved from the non-coexistence of potentiality and actuality, Aquinas is correct in asserting that it is impossible for something to be both mover and moved in the same respect and in the same way. He offers a valid defense of this assertion in *SCG* I, c.13. Aquinas argues that natural things seem to move themselves so that plants grow, animals walk, and humans act, but this kind of self-motion is merely motion per accidens, not motion per se. Regarding motion per se, things should be considered as a whole in order to move themselves as a whole; natural things, whether plants, animals, or human beings, are not considered as a whole in order to move the whole but as one part in order to move another part, just as the vegetative, animal, and human souls move their respective bodies. Aquinas thus concludes that natural things, which Aristotle regards as causa sui, do not actually move themselves but only appear to do so.[38] In this context, Aquinas strongly opposes causa sui; this is actually a major reworking of Aristotle's philosophy, since the former defines natural things as those that move themselves. According to Aristotle, a natural thing moves itself because it has its efficient cause in itself, whereas an artificial thing cannot move itself because it has its efficient cause in another. By distinguishing between the internal efficient cause and the external efficient cause, Aristotle seeks to distinguish between a natural thing and an artificial thing.[39] For Aquinas, however, the distinction between natural and artificial things is not important; he is concerned with the distinction between creatures and the Creator. Accordingly, Aquinas places the efficient cause of a creature, whether natural or artificial, outside itself, thereby interpreting the efficient cause as an external cause.[40] Aquinas's interpretation of the efficient cause is consistent with his theological intention and with Catholic doctrine, such that the ultimate efficient cause of a thing cannot be the thing itself but must be an external existence, i.e., God. Thus, a thing in the sublunar world, whatever it is, insofar as it is moved, must be moved by another and that again by another. However, Aquinas, following Aristotle, forbids infinite regression, so the chain of moving and being moved must end with a first mover who moves all others without being moved by anything else. Consistent with Aristotle's prohibition of infinite regression, Aquinas ultimately deduces God as the First Mover from the moved things, just as Aristotle does in his cosmological proof.

The second way is based on the hierarchy of efficient causes. I reconstruct the argument as follows. (1) By means of sense perception, we observe that there is a hierarchical order of efficient causes among sensible things. (2) It is impossible for a thing to be the efficient cause of itself. To be the efficient cause of itself, the thing must exist before itself, which is impossible. (3) It is impossible for efficient causes that are hierarchically ordered to go on for infinity. For in any ordered series of efficient causes, the first member causes the intermediate member, which is either one or many, and the intermediate member causes the final member. If a series of efficient causes could go on for infinity, that is, if the first

cause could be eliminated, then the intermediate and final causes would be eliminated, and in the case of the elimination of causes, the effect would also be eliminated. This cannot happen, and so it is wrong. (4) Therefore, it is necessary to posit something as the first efficient cause, hence God.

After assuming that sensible things have multiple efficient causes that are hierarchically ordered (1), Aquinas argues the following two points, which are consistent with the two premises of the first way. First (2), Aquinas claims that whatever is efficiently caused must be caused by something else. As Wippel (2000, p. 460) has correctly noted, this point echoes the aforementioned principle against causa sui, so that whatever is moved must be moved by something else. Then (3), Aquinas rejects the infinite regression of the series of efficient causes, just as he prohibits the infinite regression of moving and being moved. To illustrate this point, Gilson and Kenny use a natural phenomenon as an example. They mention that in nature, the son is begotten by the father, the father by the grandfather, and so on. However, as Gilson has aptly pointed out, if the series of efficient causes could be limited to the natural world, it could go on for infinity.[41] Thus, I follow him in assuming that by the series of efficient causes, Aquinas does not mean a series such as a father, grandfather, and so on; rather, he means the efficient causes that are arranged hierarchically, such as father, sun, and God. God, as the first efficient cause, moves the heavenly bodies in general and the sun in particular. The sun, in turn, affects the generation and decay of plants and animals, as well as human beings in the sublunar world; for example, the son is begotten by his father when the sun is at perihelion. Therefore, Aquinas places the hierarchical structure among the efficient causes and introduces the first efficient cause by opposing causa sui and prohibiting infinite regression. In this vein, Aquinas follows in Aristotle's footsteps and constructs the second way similarly to the first. While the first way focuses on God as the First Mover, i.e., the ultimate efficient cause of motion, the second way emphasizes God as the ultimate efficient cause of existence. The second way allows Aquinas to respond to Avicenna's criticism of Aristotle's cosmological proof that God is not only the ultimate efficient cause of motion but also of existence.

The third way is based on the possible and the necessary. I reconstruct the argument as follows. (1) In the sublunar world, we find some things that have the possibility of being and not being since we observe that these things are generated and corrupted. Therefore, there is a kind of being that has the possibility of being and not being, that is, the possible being. (2) However, it is impossible for all things to be like that because the possible being that has the possibility of not being does not exist at some time (quandoque). (2.1) If all things were possible beings with the possibility of not being, there would have been nothing at some time in the past (aliquando). (2.2) If that were the case, there would still be nothing now (nunc) because what is not can only begin to be through something that is. If there were nothing, it would be impossible for anything to begin to be, so there would be nothing even now. This does not happen, so it is wrong. Therefore, not all things are possible beings, but there must be necessary beings among things. (3) Among these necessary beings, some have the cause of their necessity through another, and the other has the cause of necessity in itself. Just as the chain of efficient causes cannot go on for infinity, the chain of necessary beings having the cause of their necessity through another cannot go on for infinity. (4) In order to terminate this chain, it is necessary to posit something that is necessary per se, that is, the necessary being in itself. The necessary being in itself has the cause of necessity not through another but in itself, thus being the cause of other necessary beings, that is, God.

Aquinas (1) begins with possible existents, which have the possibility to both be and not to be, as seen in their generation and decay. He then uses reductio ad absurdum to prove that in addition to possible existents, there must be necessary existents. Regarding the reductio ad absurdum argument, Wippel notes that scholars hotly debate whether Aquinas uses the two terms quandoque and aliquando to refer to the nonexistent at some time in the future or at some time in the past (Wippel 2000, p. 464, n. 57). I agree with Wippel that aliquando refers to a nonexistent at some time in the past. While Wippel

sees aliquando and quandoque as equivalent, I see them as different. Therefore, I offer an alternative interpretation, taking (2) as the general expression according to which it is impossible for all things to be possible existents, because there is some time (quandoque) at which each possible existent does not exist. Quandoque is not qualified, so it can refer to being nonexistent at some time in the past or nonexistent now; in this case, Aquinas then deals with the two possibilities. (2.1) If all things were possible existents, then at some time in the past (aliquando), there would have been nothing; (2.2) if this were the case, then, consequently, there would still be nothing now (nunc). However, this is not the case. There are things now (nunc), and in the past (aliquando), there was no time when there was nothing, so there is no time when there is or was nothing (quandoque). Thus, it is impossible for all beings to be possible existents, and there must be necessary existents. Wippel's interpretation is sound without distinguishing between quandoque and aliquando. I make this distinction not only because these two terms are different but mainly because, in the case of Wippel's interpretation, it is not clear why Aquinas would express the same meaning in two different ways, (2) and (2.1). To avoid duplication, I emphasize the distinction between quandoque and aliquando. Moreover, there is another problem with the reductio ad absurdum argument. From the antecedent "all things are possible existents", one cannot draw the consequence "there was nothing at some time in the past, and there would be nothing now", but only the consequence "there could be nothing at some time in the past, and there could be nothing now".[42] The problem is that Aquinas unilaterally emphasizes that possible existents have the possibility of not being, while deliberately ignoring the fact that possible existents also have the possibility of being. However, whether he emphasizes that possible existents have the possibility of being or the possibility of not being, Aquinas can still demonstrate beyond any doubt that possible existents can begin to exist only through existents of a higher rank, i.e., necessary existents. These necessary existents derive their necessity from another, so Kenny (1969, p. 48) correctly equates them with heavenly bodies, human souls, and angels. Since the chain of necessary existents deriving their necessity from another cannot go on for infinity, there must be a necessary existent that derives its necessity not from another but only from itself, that is, the necessary existent in itself, or God. Ultimately, Aquinas not only proves the existence of God but also characterizes God as the necessary existent in itself.

Although Aquinas's third way seems similar to Avicenna's metaphysical proof, I argue that it bears much more resemblance to Aristotle's cosmological proof. Avicenna uses syllogism to construct a metaphysical proof, which proceeds from universal existent to special existent, that is, from the universal concept of existent to God as the necessary existent in itself. In contrast, Aquinas does not use syllogism to establish the third way, which proceeds from one special existent to the other special existent, that is, from the necessary existent through another to the necessary existent in itself. Unlike Avicenna, who considers possibility and necessity to be two modes of being existent, and thus identifies two kinds of existents—i.e., possible existent and necessary existent—at the same time (*Ilāhīyyāt* I.6), Aquinas, after acknowledging possible existents, uses the reductio ad absurdum argument to prove that necessary existents, which derive their necessity from another, must exist. It is only in the final step of the third way, similar to Avicenna, that Aquinas introduces the necessary existent in itself and identifies it with God since the chain of necessary existents through another cannot go on for infinity and must have a terminus. Aquinas thus follows the Aristotelian pattern of inferring one special existent from other special existents. Just as in the cosmological proof Aristotle deduces God as the First Mover from the moved heavenly bodies, so in the third way, Aquinas deduces God as the necessary existent in itself from the necessary existents through another, such as the heavenly bodies, human souls, and angels.

The fourth way is based on the hierarchy of things. According to Aquinas, we find that among things, some are more or less good, noble, or the like that is signified by F, than others. Things are said to be more or less F according to the extent to which they approach something that is most F. Aquinas then claims on the authority of Aristotle that

something that is the best, truest, and noblest of all things is consequently the Supreme Being (maxime ens).[43] Aquinas also uses the example of fire. Just as fire, as the hottest thing, is the cause of all other hot things, so something that is most F is the cause of all those things that are more or less F. Aquinas thus concludes that there is something that is the cause of all being, goodness, and perfection, that is, God. As Kenny (1969, p. 71) aptly points out, all Thomists, while taking different positions on the interpretation of the fourth way, agree that on this point, "for better or worse, Aquinas comes closest to Platonism".[44] I agree with Kenny that Aquinas is ostensibly appealing to Aristotle here, but in fact, he is following Platonism. According to Platonism, all things are ordered in a hierarchical way, such that intelligible things transcend sensible things, and among intelligible things, which are Platonic ideas, ideas of a higher rank (which Plato calls the highest kinds, such as rest, motion, identity, difference, being and not-being)[45] transcend ideas of a lower rank (the ideas of artifacts or natural things).[46] At the top of this hierarchy is the Supreme Idea, which Plato calls the Idea of the Good (*Resp*. 507b5-7). Through the allegory of the sun, Plato claims that the Idea of the Good transcends all other ideas by bringing them into being and making them knowable and is thus the cause of all other beings, being both the cause of existence and the cause of knowledge (*Resp*. 509b2-10). In my view, what Aquinas means by God here is similar to the Platonic idea of the Good. Like the Platonic idea of the Good, Aquinas's God is the cause of all being, all goodness, and all perfection and thus is the Supreme Being, the best and the most perfect. Following Platonism, Aquinas thus illuminates a way of characterizing God, that is, via eminentiae (Wippel 2000, p. 474). Accordingly, the superlative form of the adjective referring to a certain quality F is used to describe God as the most F. Therefore, in my view, Kenny is very careful and precise in saying that Aquinas is closest to Platonism here, while excluding Neoplatonism, even though many Neoplatonists do not admit any difference between the two. Wippel (2000, p. 469) also notes that in the fourth way, Aquinas is inspired by Platonic and Neoplatonic sources without distinguishing between them. In the present context, there is a crucial difference between Neoplatonism and Platonism. Following Platonism, Aquinas here presents God in an absolutely positive way (via eminentiae), describing God as the Supreme Being, who is thus accessible to the human intellect. According to Neoplatonism, however, God cannot be portrayed in any positive way but should rather be characterized in an absolutely negative way (via negationis),[47] because God, like the Idea of the Good interpreted by Plotinus in the classical Neoplatonic way, transcends both being and intellect (τἀγαθὸν καὶ τὸ ἐπέκεινα νοῦ καὶ ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας, *Enneades* V. 1.8.6-8),[48] such that God is not being and is not accessible to the human intellect, thus being unthinkable and unsayable for humans. Neoplatonism lays the foundation for negative theology, while Platonism contributes to the establishment of natural theology. Therefore, what Aquinas follows here is not Neoplatonism but rather Platonism.[49]

The fifth way is based on the governance of things. We observe that natural things always or often act in the same way to achieve their goal. This observation shows that things do not achieve their goal by chance but rather because they intend to do so. Natural things that lack consciousness tend toward a goal only when they are directed by something with consciousness and intelligence. Therefore, there is something intelligent that directs all natural things toward a goal, and that something is God. Obviously, this proof is based on natural teleology, according to which natural things act in an orderly fashion and pursue an ideal. Natural things, lacking intelligence, can only pursue the ideal if they are directed by a supernatural, intelligent being, i.e., God.

Among the past and present Thomists who have offered different interpretations of the five ways, some have drawn attention to a single way and some to multiple but not all ways (MacDonald 1991; Shields and Pasnau 2016),[50] and still others have interpreted the five ways as a whole (Gilson 1957, 2002; Kenny 1969; Martin 1997; Wippel 2000; Pawl 2012; De Haan 2013). Wippel summarizes the unified interpretation into three approaches: some search for historical sources that Aquinas might have had available, others try to reduce the five ways to a single logical scheme, and others try to reduce all five ways to the four

causes (Wippel 2000, pp. 497–99, n. 161, n. 162, n. 163). Kenny (1969, p. 36) follows the last approach, claiming that "the five ways have in common a formal structure which in turn is applied to the four causes, and the different types of causality provide different contents for this formal structure" (De Haan 2013, pp. 147–52). In my view, Kenny is correct in claiming that the first two ways apply the notion of efficient causality, and the fifth way is associated with final causality. On the other hand, Kenny assumes that the third way is concerned with material causality and the fourth way argues from formal causality; this does not convince me. As analyzed, in the third way, Aquinas argues by inferring God, a necessary existent in itself, from necessary existents through another, which in turn cause possible existents. Neither possible existents nor necessary existents, whether they derive their necessity from another or not, can be equated with material cause. As for the fourth way, I argue that Aquinas does not argue from Aristotelian formal cause but from Platonic exemplar cause. Contrary to Wippel (2000, pp. 473–74), who identifies formal causality with exemplar causality, I suggest that the two appear similar but are essentially different. According to the Aristotelian four causes, material and formal causes, i.e., matter and form, are combined to form a sensible compound. From the Platonic perspective, the sensible compound is identified as a copy and comes into being through participation in the model, which refers to the exemplar cause. Many Thomists, including Kenny, have tried to show that Aquinas has an Aristotelian origin in constructing his five-way proof; nevertheless, Aquinas's sources of thought may be more than Aristotelian, as evidenced, for example, by his reworking of Avicenna's metaphysical proof in the third way and his adherence to Platonism in the fourth way. Therefore, Aquinas's five-way proof cannot be simply summarized by Aristotle's four causes.

Regarding the unified interpretation of Aquinas's five ways, I agree with Gilson (1957, pp. 76–77), who summarizes three features that the five ways have in common. First, Gilson notes that each of the five ways begins with the observation of sensible things because, according to Aquinas, an existence can be inferred only by proceeding from some other existence. As the five ways show, Aquinas deduces God's existence from some other existence, inferring God as the First Mover from the things He moves, God as the First Efficient Cause from the things He causes, God as the necessary existent in itself from the necessary existents that derive their necessity from another, God as the being in the highest degree from the things that exist in a higher or lower degree than others, and God as the intelligent being from the things that He directs toward the ideal. Gilson then mentions the other two features that the five ways have in common, which can be summarized as causality and the prohibition of infinite regression.[51] Given the prohibition of infinite regression, Aquinas deduces God as cause from the corresponding effect, so that God is described as the cause of all motion, the efficient cause of all things, the necessary existent in itself, the Supreme Being, and the ruler of all things. Aquinas thus follows the Aristotelian pattern of inferring cause from effect. Just as Aristotle deduces the First Mover from the moved heavenly bodies, Aquinas deduces God as Creator from the creatures (Wippel 2000, p. 497).

In addition, I offer an explanation of why Aquinas returns to the Aristotelian cosmological proof against the background of Avicenna's harsh criticism from three perspectives, one epistemological, one metaphysical, and one theological. First, Aquinas is able to construct the cosmological proof that proceeds from effect to cause because he follows the Aristotelian epistemological principle, according to which our cognitive activity proceeds from what is prior to us to what is prior by nature. By "what is prior to us", Aquinas does not mean what is prior to the human intellect (as Avicenna claims) but rather what is prior to sensation (as Aristotle asserts). What is prior to sensation is the sensible thing from which Aquinas begins his argument. Thus, in each of the five ways, Aquinas proceeds from the sensible, which is prior to us, to the intelligible, which is prior by nature, that is, from effect to cause (*ST* I, q. 2, a. 2). Second, Aquinas returns to the cosmological proof that Avicenna discarded because causality, that is, the causal relationship in the creationist sense between the creatures and the Creator, plays a crucial role in his metaphysical considerations.[52]

Aquinas replaces Avicenna's distinction between the possible existent and the necessary existent with the distinction of cause and effect in the creationist sense, i.e., the Creator and the creatures, because in Aquinas's view, Avicenna's distinction is merely conceptual, whereas the Creator and the creatures establish a real distinction. Although Avicenna's syllogistic way of deducing God as a special existent from a universal existent is necessary, in Aquinas's view, what is demonstrated by the syllogism is not a truly existing God but merely the concept of God. The same criticism applies to Anselm's ontological proof (*SCG* I, c. 11). To show that God actually exists, this leaves only cosmological proof, which follows the Aristotelian pattern of inferring cause from effect. Third, Aquinas constructs his cosmological proof by inheriting the Aristotelian tradition that lays the foundation for natural theology. Accordingly, humankind has access to God through our natural reason. Aquinas's theological thought includes not only natural theology but also negative and revelatory theology (sacra doctrina). In accordance with Aquinas's cosmological proof, natural theology holds that humankind can ascend to God through our natural reason, while negative and revelatory theology holds that it is possible for God to descend from His divine nature to humankind only through His own freedom and will. Although they cut off the path of human reason ascending from humankind to God, negative and revelatory theology preserve the path of grace descending from God to humankind, leaving room for mysticism in philosophy, salvation by grace in theology, and religious experience for believers.

In summary, Aquinas believes that God's existence cannot be inferred from any idea or concept but only from some other existence; therefore, he criticizes Anselm's ontological proof by the idea of God and abandons Avicenna's metaphysical proof by the concept of existence while restoring Aristotle's cosmological proof by causality. Just as Aristotle deduces God as the First Mover from the moved heavenly bodies, Aquinas constructs his five-way proof to deduce God as the Creator from the creatures, with the Creator appearing as the First Mover, the necessary existent in itself, or the efficient, final, or existential cause of all things. Aquinas returns to the Aristotelian cosmological proof, which proceeds from effect to cause, not only because he restores the Aristotelian epistemological principle, which proceeds from the sensible to the intelligible, but more fundamentally because causality, that is, the causal relationship in the creationist sense between the creatures and the Creator, plays a key role in his metaphysical considerations. More importantly, in constructing the five-way proof, Aquinas follows the Aristotelian tradition that lays the foundation for natural theology. Thus, on the basis of natural theology, human beings have the capacity to know God through natural reason.

5. Conclusions

I examine the three proofs of God's existence proposed by Aristotle, Avicenna, and Thomas Aquinas. Since philosophers and theologians dedicated to proving God's existence do not question God's existence, proving God's existence is primarily not an ontological issue but an epistemological issue that discusses how we as humans are able to know God. Thus, the proof of God's existence is first and foremost an epistemological question closely related to epistemological principles. According to the Aristotelian epistemological principle that proceeds from the sensible to the intelligible, Aristotle constructs a cosmological proof by inferring God as the First Mover from the moved heavenly bodies, and Aquinas constructs a five-way proof by inferring God as the Creator from the creatures. While Aristotle and Aquinas follow the same pattern of inferring cause from effect, Avicenna deduces God as a special existent from a universal existent in accordance with the epistemological principle of deduction from the universal to the particular. Aristotle, Avicenna, and Aquinas construct different proofs of God's existence not only because they follow different epistemological principles but, more fundamentally, because they construct metaphysics in different ways and emphasize different issues within their metaphysical frameworks. Aristotle constructs a cosmological proof because causality, that is, the causal relationship in the sense of moving and being moved between God and the heavenly bodies, plays a

crucial role in the metaphysical framework of ousiology and aitiology. Aquinas constructs a five-way proof, similar to Aristotle's cosmological proof, because causality, that is, the causal relationship in the creationist sense between God as Creator and the creatures, plays a key role in his metaphysical considerations. While Aristotle and Aquinas focus on causality (albeit in different senses), Avicenna focuses on modality. Avicenna constructs a metaphysical proof because modality, especially the mode of necessity, occupies a central place in his metaphysical construction (Bertolacci 2008; Adamson 2013; De Haan 2020), and more importantly, he uses syllogism to reconstruct metaphysics as a universal science, i.e., ontology. In addition, Aquinas restores the cosmological proof that Avicenna discards with his theological intention so that one can rationally address humankind's relationship with God. Consistent with the cosmological proof, natural theology holds that humankind has the capacity to know God through our natural reason. In conclusion, Aristotle's cosmological proof by causality, Avicenna's metaphysical proof by modality, and Aquinas's five-way proof by causality differ from each other because of their different epistemological principles, different metaphysical constructions, and particular theological intentions.

Finally, regarding the question of what proof of God's existence actually proves, I would offer the following explanation. Philosophers and theologians who are dedicated to proving God's existence do not question God's existence; they disagree on the way in which God exists. Therefore, what proof of God's existence does is to specify God's nature or essence because God's existence and essence are unified. Different proofs characterize God's essence differently. Aristotle uses a cosmological proof to establish God as the First Mover in terms of causality. Avicenna uses a metaphysical proof to establish God as the necessary existent in itself in terms of modality. In his five-way proof, Aquinas defines the nature of God not only in terms of modality as the necessary existent in itself (as Avicenna does) but also primarily in terms of causality (as Aristotle does), identifying God as the First Mover, the primary efficient, final, and existential cause. Thus, Gilson is correct in stating that Aquinas, proceeding from existence to essence, uses "proofs for the existence of God to form a notion of His essence" (Gilson 1957, p. 57; 2002, p. 51) and thus properly lists the proofs for God's existence under the general heading "On the Essentiality of the Divine Substance" (Gilson 1957, p. 52; 2002, p. 46). In my view, Gilson's statement applies not only to Aquinas's five-way proof but also to Avicenna's metaphysical proof and Aristotle's cosmological proof. It is through these proofs of God's existence that we finally arrive at the essence of God. In turn, the different essences of God that one arrives at through different approaches do not in any way undermine the existential uniqueness and simplicity of God.

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Notes

1 Aristotle, *Metaph*. Γ2, 1003a33-1003b19. I subscribe to the "focus-meaning" interpretation proposed by some interpreters; see Aubenque (1978, 1986) and Owen (1986).

2 In many places (*Metaph.* B1, 995b13-15, 995b31-36; B2, 997a34-b3; Z2, 1028b27-32; M1, 1076a10-13), Aristotle asks whether there is a kind of substance other than sensible substance, i.e., intelligible substance. He rejects two possible answers by criticizing Plato's ideas and classifying mathematical entities as quantities. The only intelligible substance that Aristotle truly recognizes is God. I will explain this point in due course.

3 Aristotle, *Metaph.* E1, 1026a27-29; K7, 1064b9-11; *PA* A1, 641a34-36.

4 Aristotle, *Metaph*. E1, 1026a29-31; Z11, 1037a13-17; K7, 1064b11-14; M1, 1076a8-15; *Phys*. B2, 194b9-15; *PA* A1, 641a36-b4.

5 Aristotle, *Metaph.* Λ1, 1069a36-b2; Λ10, 1075b130-14; K2, 1060a27-31.

6 In *Metaph.* Λ1, 1069a30-36, Aristotle speaks of the three kinds of substances (οὐσίαι δὲ τρεῖς, 1069a30), natural things, heavenly bodies, and God. Aristotle is precise and correct in stating that natural things such as (human beings), animals, and plants are sensible and perishable substances (1069a30-32). However, the (four) elements appear in place of the heavenly bodies, representing sensible and imperishable substances (1069a32-33), and the ideas and mathematical entities appear in place of God, representing intelligible and immovable substances (1069a33-36). According to Aristotle's doctrine of categories, mathematical entities are not substances, but belong to the category of quantity. Aristotle sharply criticizes Plato's ideas and does not recognize them as substances. Although they are intelligible and immovable, Plato's ideas and mathematical entities are not substances in the Aristotelian sense, so they should not appear here. Although he recognizes the four elements as substances in *On Generation and Corruption*, Aristotle does not discuss them in *Metaphysics* Λ, so they should not appear here. In this case, one might ask why Aristotle mentions the elements in Λ1, which he does not discuss here, and speaks of Plato's ideas and mathematical entities, which he does not consider substances. I suppose that Aristotle introduces these into his discussion of substances because he uses the doxographical method. In order to express his own doctrine, Aristotle presents the doctrine proposed by pre-Aristotelian philosophers and argues with them. To present the doctrine of the four causes, in *Metaph.* A, Aristotle goes through all the pre-Socratics, Socrates and Plato, who discuss the related issues. Similarly, in *Metaph.* Λ, Aristotle refers to the pre-Aristotelian doctrines of substances, although he disagrees with some of them, in order to present his own doctrine of substances. After introducing the three kinds of substances in Λ1, Aristotle discusses them one by one. He presents natural things as sensible and perishable substances in Λ2-5, heavenly bodies as sensible and imperishable substances in Λ6-8, and God as intelligent and immovable substance in Λ6-9. In particular, in Λ6-8 Aristotle presents God as the First Unmoved Mover by relating Him to the moved heavenly bodies, and in Λ9 he presents God as a purely intelligent entity. Finally, Aristotle summarizes the relationships among these three kinds of substances in Λ10. Thus, in terms of the overall structure and content of Book Λ, Aristotle discusses the three kinds of substances: natural things, heavenly bodies, and God. For Aristotle's discussion of these three substances, see also Liu (2019, pp. 24–25).

7 Aristotle, *Metaph.* Γ2, 1003b17-19; Λ1, 1069a25-26. See also Liu (2019, pp. 25–26).

8 Scholars have vigorously debated whether Aristotle's metaphysics is metaphysica generalis (i.e., ontology), metaphysica specialis (i.e., theology), or both, and I will not enter into that discussion here. Instead, I offer an alternative interpretation by suggesting that Aristotle constructs metaphysics as ousiology and aitiology. For a detailed discussion of how Aristotle constructs ousiology and aitiology and how he deals with the relationship between them, see Liu (2019, pp.1–33).

9 See also Aristotle, *Phys*. A1, 184a18-21; A5, 188b30-33, 189a4-9; *APo*. A1, 71b33-72a5; *De An*. B2, 413a11-13; *Metaph*. Δ11, 1018b29-34; Z3, 1029b3-12; *NE* A2, 1095a30-b4. See also Liu (2019, p. 26, n. 34).

10 Scholars disagree on the number of heavenly bodies Aristotle mentions in *Metaph*. Λ8, 1073b17-1074a14. Ross (1924, p. 392) thinks there are fifty-five heavenly bodies, while Cohen and Reeve (2020, p. 22) think there are ninety-four. I will not enter into this discussion here, because what is important for the cosmological proof is that there are many heavenly bodies, not one, and that there are finitely many, not infinitely many.

11 See also Aristotle, *Phys*. Θ5, 256a13-14; H1, 242a49-50.

12 Aristotle believes that the heavenly bodies cannot interact with each other because, in my interpretation, Aristotle sees the heavenly bodies as material entities that cannot actively move themselves or anything else without an external efficient cause.

13 Aristotle, *Metaph.* Λ7, 1072a24-26; *Phys*. Θ5, 256a4-21; H1, 242a49-66.

14 Alexander, *Alexandri In Metaphysica Commentaria* 686. 2–16.

15 Enrico (2001, p. 202): "Furthermore, says Theophrastus, if heaven is living like other living beings, its movement could be explained by the action of its soul, and would not need any unmovable mover."

16 Aristotle, *Metaph.* Λ8, 1074a36-37; *Phys*. Θ5, 256a13-21; H1, 242a49-55.

17 For a detailed reconstruction of Aristotle's cosmological proof and a detailed discussion of two assumptions of this proof, see Liu (2019, pp. 275–82).

18 See also Aristotle, *Metaph*. Λ7, 1072b18-30; Λ9, 1074b38-1075a10.

19 God constantly realizes Himself throughout eternity by driving the heavenly bodies in an eternal circular motion. The circular motion of the heavenly bodies, especially the motion of the sun around the earth, affects the creation and destruction of all natural things in the sublunar world. According to Aristotle's "geocentric theory", human beings, plants, and animals are created when the sun reaches its perigee; they are destroyed when the sun reaches its apogee. For a detailed discussion of how the three kinds of substances, that is, God, heavenly bodies, and natural things, are related to each other, see Aristotle, *Metaph.* Λ10, 1075a11-25; Liu (2019, pp. 287–91).

20 According to the traditional interpretation, Avicenna provides a proof of God's existence in *Ilāhīyyāt* I.6-7. Some scholars question the traditional interpretation and suggest that Avicenna does not prove God's existence until *Ilāhīyyāt* VIII.1-3 (Davidson 1987; Bertolacci 2007; De Haan 2013, 2016).

21 Some scholars see Avicenna's proof as cosmological (Davidson 1987; Chignell and Pereboom 2020), while others see it as metaphysical (Marmura 1980; Lasica 2019).

22 I use the terms "metaphysical" and "ontological" as synonyms for the proof of God's existence. While some scholars (Mayer 2001; Lasica 2019) characterize Avicenna's proof as ontological, I prefer to present it as metaphysical, so that Avicenna's metaphysical proof is not confused with Anselm's ontological proof.

23 Avicenna, *Commentaire sur le livre Lambda de la Metaphysique d' Aristote (chapitres 6–10)*, (2014, pp. 48–49); Gutas (2014, p. 199).

24 Honnefelder (1987, p. 168): "Was Metaphysik von Gott erkennen kann, vermag sie nach Aristoteles nur im Ausgang von den Wirkungen zu erkennen. Ein solcher Leitfaden erlaubt aber nur eine Erkenntnis Gottes per accidens."

25 Aristotle, *APo*. A6, 74b5-12, 75a12-14, 75a28-31; A7, 75a38-b6; A8, 75b21-24; A9, 76a4-15; A10, 76b11-16.

26 Avicenna, *Ilāhīyyāt* I.5, p. 22, lines 19-22. I refer to Marmura's and Bertolacci's translation with slight modification.

27 Avicenna, *Ilāhīyyāt* I.5, p. 22, lines 19-22; p. 23, lines 15–17; see also Bertolacci (2008, p. 36, n. 18).

28 Bertolacci (2006, p. 155): "As the fact of occurring at the very beginning of the *Ilāhīyyāt* witnesses, the articulation of Ontology constitutes, according to Avicenna, the main axis of metaphysics."

29 In the proemium of his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Aquinas defines metaphysics from three perspectives and gives it three names. Metaphysics is called first philosophy, which examines the primary causes of things; metaphysics is also called divine science or theology, which examines the intelligent being, completely separated from matter, both in reality and in the mind; and metaphysics is finally called transphysics, which examines the universal principles, being and its essential properties, such as one–many and potency–actualization (Metaphysica, inquantum considerat ens et ea quae consequuntur ipsum. Haec enim transphysica inveniuntur in via resolutionis, sicut magis communia post minus communia. [...] Unde et illa scientia maxime est intellectualis, quae circa principia maxime universalia versatur. Quae quidem sunt ens, et ea quae consequuntur ens, ut unum et multa, potentia et actus). In my opinion, Aquinas inherits the ontological conception of metaphysics from Avicenna, while he inherits the theological and aitiological conceptions of metaphysics from Aristotle.

30 Aristotle, *APo*. A4, 73b16-21; A10, 76b3-16; Avicenna, *Ilāhīyyāt* I.3; Bertolacci (2006, pp. 213–30; 2007, pp. 65–73).

31 Bertolacci (2008, pp. 48–49) does not call Avicenna's division diairesis, and I interpret his description and summary of Avicenna's division as diairesis.

32 According to the recent research, there is ample evidence that Avicenna not only recognizes cross-division but also applies it on a wide scale. Lammer has astutely noted that in the *Physics of the Healing* (*al-Samā'al-ṭabī'ī*, 2009, p. 39), Avicenna classifies power (*quwwa*, *potentia*, δύναμις) into four types (Lammer 2018, pp. 290–99, 306). I believe that Avicenna establishes the fourfold classification by means of cross-division. Avicenna constructs the cross-division by cross-combining the two pairs of attributes, i.e., single function–multiple function and without volition–with volition, with each other. The cross-combination of the two pairs of attributes results in the four pairs of combinations that characterize four kinds of things endowed with a certain power: the natural thing is single-function and acts without volition, the celestial soul is single-function and acts with volition, the vegetative soul is multifunction and acts without volition, and the animal soul is multifunction and acts with volition. I would also note that Lammer has also mentioned another cross-division made by Themistius, Philoponus, and al-Fārābī, such that the two pairs of attributes, i.e., relative–absolute and hypothesis–postulate, are cross-combined. In this way, the fourfold classification is established: relative hypotheses, relative postulates, absolute hypotheses, and absolute postulates (Lammer 2018, pp. 88–91). Moreover, I observe that in *Ilāhīyyāt* I.2, Avicenna uses cross-division to divide mathematics into four subdisciplines and the subject of mathematics into four kinds. The subject of mathematics, quantity, is divided into two parallel pairs, continuous–discrete and abstraction from matter–existence in matter, and the two pairs are cross-combined, thus forming a cross-division that establishes four pairs of combinations that characterize four kinds of quantity. Through this cross-division, quantity, the subject of mathematics, is divided into four kinds, and accordingly, mathematics is divided into four subdisciplines as follows. Geometry studies the quantity that is continuous and abstract from matter (i.e., lines, surfaces, and bodies); astronomy studies the quantity that is continuous and exists in matter (i.e., heavenly bodies); arithmetic studies the quantity that is discrete and abstract from matter (i.e., numbers); and music studies the quantity that is discrete and exists in matter (i.e., notes). Based on what has been said, it is reasonable to assume that in *Ilāhīyyāt* I.6, Avicenna uses cross-division to make a fourfold classification of existent. Notably, Avicenna did not invent cross-division. Plato and Aristotle used cross-division extensively; in his commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*, Porphyry notes Aristotle's use of cross-division and calls it chiasmus (χιαστή). See Porphyry (1887) *Porphyrii Isagoge et In Aristotelis Categorias Commentarium*, 78.34-79.11; Liu (2019, pp. 15–18, n. 16, n. 17, n. 18). For Plato's and Aristotle's use of chiasmus and a detailed discussion of the difference between chiasmus and diairesis, see Liu (2021).

33 Some scholars claim that Avicenna inaugurated the second beginning of metaphysics by reconstructing metaphysics, although they disagree on how Avicenna made a new beginning for metaphysics. See Verbeke (1983, p. 10, 23), Bertolacci (2007, p. 73) and Aertsen (2012, p. 75).

34 Bertolacci (2007, p. 64): "Avicenna defends (...) that metaphysics can have a theological goal precisely because it has an ontological starting point".

35 Kenny, Shields, and Pasnau suggest that Aquinas uses movetur in both intransitive and passive senses; MacDonald, Wippel, and Pawl read movetur only in the passive sense. See Kenny (1969, pp. 8–9), MacDonald (1991, pp. 121–24), Wippel (2000, pp. 414–15, 444), Pawl (2012, pp. 116–17, 127, n. 18) and Shields and Pasnau (2016, pp. 107–14).

36 In Greek, however, κινεῖσθαι can also be used in the sense of a medium. Notably, Aristotle claims not that something moved must be moved by something else (*ab alio*) but rather that something moved must be moved by something (ὑπό τινος). Although

Aristotle's aim is to infer an external mover from the moved heavenly bodies, his formulation and the possible use of κινεῖσθαι in the sense of medium indicate that Aristotle does not completely exclude the internal efficient cause and emphasize the external efficient cause, as Aquinas does. Thus, there is a slight difference between Aquinas's imitation and Aristotle's original formulation, although this difference does not affect the argument.

37 Thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers who mentions Aristotle's definition of motion. From this perspective, the matter is more clearly illuminated. Aristotle defines motion as the actualization of what exists potentially, insofar as it exists potentially (*Phys*. Γ1, 201a10-11). In other words, motion is defined as the process from potentiality to actuality. At the beginning, the thing exists in potentiality, and motion does not begin; at the end, the thing achieves its goal and exists in actuality, and motion ends. Movement is neither beginning nor end, neither potentiality nor actuality, but the process from beginning to end and from potentiality to actuality. From the perspective of movement, it is illuminating that potentiality and actuality cannot coexist simultaneously. According to Aristotle, however, not only can moving and being moved coexist, but they must operate simultaneously for movement to occur (*Phys*. Γ3, 202a21-b5). For example, the moving hand and the moved stick operate simultaneously to lift the stick. The same reasoning applies to the movement of animals: the moving soul and the moved body work simultaneously for a human being to act. When there is movement, the moving and the moved work together at the same time. Therefore, I think the two sets, potentiality–actuality and moving–being moved, cannot be confused with each other.

38 In my opinion, the argument proposed by Aquinas in the *SCG* I, c. 13 bears much resemblance to the argument established by Proclus in the *Elements of Theology* (abbreviated *ET*). In the seventeenth proposition, Proclus argues, "But if the mover is one part and the moved another, the whole will not in itself be self-moved, since it will be composed of parts that are not self-moved: it will have the appearance of being self-moved, but in essence it will not be so" (*ET*, Prop. 17. lines 5-8). I have slightly modified Dodd's translation.

39 Aristotle, *Metaph.* Λ3, 1070a7-8; *Phys*. B1, 192b8-15, 27–30.

40 Accordingly, in explaining the four causes, Aquinas regards the material and formal causes as internal, while he treats the efficient and final causes as external; see *De principii naturae* c. 3 (1999, p. 60): Causas autem accipit tam pro extrinsecis quam pro intrinsecis: Materia et forma dicuntur intrinsecae rei, eo quod sunt partes constituentes rem; efficiens et finalis dicuntur extrinsecae, quia sunt extra rem.

41 Gilson (1957, pp. 66–68; 2002, p. 64) emphasizes that in the second way, Aquinas places the hierarchical, vertical structure among the efficient causes in order to avoid infinite regression. Gilson (2002, p. 74) further asserts that "all the proofs presume that the causes and effects appearing in them are arranged hierarchically". Pasnau takes up this idea by claiming that in each of the five ways, Aquinas replaces the infinite horizontal series of causes going back in time with a vertical series, thus ending the infinite regression. See Shields and Pasnau (2016, p. 112) and Pasnau (2022, p. 5).

42 Pawl (2012, p. 122) also questions the validity of this deduction.

43 In explaining that the truest being is the Supreme Being, scholars carefully distinguish between logical truth and ontological truth (what Shields and Pasnau call the "ontic conception/sense of truth"), correctly noting that Aquinas uses "truth" not in the logical sense (e.g., a true proposition) but in the ontological sense (i.e., truth refers to reality). See Wippel (2000, p. 471), Pawl (2012, p. 124) and Shields and Pasnau (2016, pp. 116–17).

44 Pawl, Shields, and Pasnau interpret Aquinas's dictum literally, suggesting that Aquinas is appealing to Aristotle, as he claims in the fourth way; see Pawl (2012, p. 124) and Shields and Pasnau (2016, pp. 114–15).

45 Plato, *Soph.* 254b-260a.

46 Plato, *Resp*. 595c-597e; *Tim*. 27c-31b, 39e-40d.

47 See (O'Rourke 1971) "Via causalitatis; via negationis; via eminentiae (Weg der Ursächlichkeit; Weg der Negation; Weg des Übermaßes)", in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, pp. 1034–38.

48 See also Proclus, *ET*, Prop. 8. lines 3-4: "If all beings desire the Good, it is evident that the First Good transcends [all] beings" (εἰ γὰρ πάντα τὰ ὄντα τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἐφίεται, δῆλον ὅτι τὸ πρώτως ἀγαθὸν ἐπέκεινά ἐστι τῶν ὄντων). I have slightly modified Dodds's translation.

49 To track down Aquinas's resources for constructing the fourth way, I make a strict distinction between Platonism and Neoplatonism, the distinction between via eminentiae and via negationis, and carefully emphasize that here, in the fourth way, Aquinas takes the via eminentiae by following Platonism. Influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas generally uses not only the positive way but also the negative way to characterize God. Thanks to the anonymous reviewer for reminding me of this point.

50 MacDonald (1991) focuses on the first way, Shields and Pasnau (2016) on the first and fourth ways. According to Wippel and Pawl, many scholars focus on the third way; see Wippel (2000, pp. 462–63, n. 52, 464, n. 57, 465, n. 60, n. 61, 466, n. 63, 466–67, n. 64) and Pawl (2012, p. 130, n. 49).

51 In the sixth and final edition and translation of *Le Thomisme*, Gilson (2002, p. 74) summarizes the last two features common to the five ways as one characteristic by stating that "a second characteristic is that all the proofs presume that the causes and effects appearing in them are arranged hierarchically". In other words, the second common feature is both causality and the hierarchical order between cause and effect. Gilson (2002, pp. 74–75) emphasizes the hierarchical order between cause and effect because only the hierarchy can end the infinite regression.

[52] Aquinas not only emphasizes causality, i.e., the causal relationship between the Creator and the creatures, in the five-way proof, he also emphasizes it from other perspectives. Since the Creator absolutely transcends and completely dominates the creatures, the causal relationship between them is asymmetrical, irreversible, and creationist. To express the causal relationship between the Creator and creatures in this sense, Aquinas uses the analogy of attribution in such a way that the same predicate "good" is said of God and creatures, such as "God is good" and "creatures are good". The predicate "good" is not used univocally because God is essentially different from creatures; nor is it used purely equivocally because, by creating them, God is closely related to creatures. Since God is both essentially different from and causally related to creatures, the relationship between God and creatures can be adequately expressed only with the analogy of attribution, and "good" is thus used analogically. Within the analogy of attribution, Aquinas distinguishes between the analogy of many-to-one and the analogy of one-to-another, with the latter characterizing the relationship of creatures to God; e.g., the goodness of creatures is caused by and oriented toward the absolute goodness of God. Aquinas also characterizes this kind of relationship with participation, according to which creatures are good because they participate in the absolute goodness of God. Creatures can participate in any property of God because God has made it all possible. In order to accurately and properly characterize the causal relationship in the creationist sense between the Creator and creatures, Aquinas introduces participation and the analogy of attribution. Thus, as we have seen, many of Aquinas's important metaphysical considerations, such as participation, analogy, and the five-way proof of God's existence, revolve around causality in the creationist sense between the Creator and the creatures. On Aquinas's analogy, see *De potentia* q. 7, a. 7; *SCG* I, c. 29-36.; *ST* I, q. 13, a. 5-6. For an interpretation of Aquinas's analogy, see Montagnes ([1963] 2004), McInerny (1996), Pannenberg (2007), Wippel (2000), Aertsen (2012), Spencer (2015), and Hochschild (2019).

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Article

Being and Essence of Creation in *Liber de Causis* and Aquinas's Reception

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Abstract: Derived from Proclus's *Elementatio Theologica*, *Liber de Causis* (*LDC*), with the concept of "creation" at its core, provides a substantial monotheistic adaptation of the former that was absorbed and criticized by medieval philosophers represented by Aquinas. Taking Aquinas's classical distinction between being and essence as the axis of inquiry, this paper first points out that, in contrast to Proclus, *LDC* not only introduces the concept of creation but also includes in this concept the distinction between being and essence. By reviewing the different readings of Avicenna and Aquinas on the division, this paper then sketches out two different tendencies in the medieval Arab and Latin worlds to either accept the concept of creation in *LDC* that both being and essence of individua are given from the One via intelligence or to take a further monotheistical transformation, which declaims the One bestowing the being of creations directly. Through this case study, this paper attempts to show the influence of *LDC* on Aquinas's thought and demonstrate the civilizational transitions, fusions, and exchanges that characterized medieval philosophy.

Keywords: Thomas Aquinas; *Liber de Causis*; Avicenna; creation; being and essence

1. Introduction

Liber de Causis (*LDC*) is an essential work bridging late ancient Greek (Neoplatonism), Arabic, and Latin medieval philosophy, and it enormously influenced scholastic philosophy. The *LDC* is generally believed to have been written by an anonymous Arab scholar, presumably living in Baghdad in the ninth century, and probably by a scholar of the Al-Kindi school (Taylor 2020). Costa (1995) has even suggested that it was written by Al-Kindi himself. For a long time, the book was treated as the work of Aristotle. In reality, however, the content of the book is derived from the *Elements of Theology* by Proclus (and partially the ideas of Plotinus s. Steel (2022) and Costa (1992)), and the author has presented the content with a monotheistic twist.

The *LDC* explores the basic question of how the many derive from the One. The author, following the Neoplatonic way of thinking, argues that everything comes from the absolute One as the First Cause and equates it with pure goodness. The Absolute One and the many are not linked by several intermediaries but by a single intermediary, intelligence. The three entities of the Divine Principle—the First Cause, the Intelligence, and the Soul—constitute a hierarchical order, and each of these entities has a hierarchy within itself, which is also clearly inherited from the classical teachings of Neoplatonism.

Although the main topic of the book is rather Neoplatonic, the *LDC* is not a simple repetition of Neoplatonist thought but rather a modification and development of it, as Aquinas makes clear in the preface to the *Commentary on the Book of Causes*:

> And in Greek we find handed down a book of this type by the Platonist Proclus, which contains 211 propositions and is entitled The *Elements of Theology*. And in Arabic we find the present book which is called *On Causes* among Latin readers, [a work] known to have been translated from Arabic and not [known] to be extant at all in Greek. Thus, it seems that one of the Arab philosophers excerpted it from

> this book by Proclus, especially since everything in it is contained much more fully and more diffusely (multo plenius et diffusius) in that of Proclus. (Aquinas 1955, pp. 4–5; 1996, p. 4, my italics)

Here, Aquinas uses the pair of "more fully" and "more diffusely" to point out the two facets of the *LDC*: on the one hand, as noted above, the book inherits many of the classical doctrines of Neoplatonism; on the other hand, the author provides his own new development. However, what is the new development? As Steel (2022, p. 37) emphasizes, the *LDC* transforms Proclus's thought in a distinctly creationist and monotheistic sense (dans un sens créationniste et monothéiste). It is, therefore, natural that one of the most central elements that researchers have focused on is the notion of "creation" in the text (e.g., Costa 1992; Taylor 2012, etc.). Furthermore, Sweeney (1959), Schäfer (2017), and Bertolacci (2022) have noted the distinction of existence and essence in the theory of creation in the *LDC*, and Bertolacci additionally explores Avicenna's reception of this distinction. Although the influence of the *LDC* on Aquinas's thought has long been explored in several dimensions (e.g., Beierwaltes 1963; Dodds 2016), the question of how Aquinas inherited the existence–essence distinction from the *LDC* and his debate with medieval Arabic thinkers (especially Avicenna) deserves further investigation. The intention of this paper is to explore, from a historical reception perspective, the origins of this division in the *LDC* and how it underwent development in the medieval Arab community (especially Avicenna) and subsequently impacted Aquinas's thought and how Aquinas transformed it even further in terms of monotheism.

The second part of this paper explores Proclus's emanation and the concept of creation in the *LDC* and the relationship between the two, especially concerning the existence–essence distinction; the third part explores Avicenna's reception of the concept of creation and the named distinction in the *LDC* as the object of Aquinas's critique; the fourth part explores Aquinas's interpretation and modification of the distinction with his critique of Avicenna, showing the progression of the scholastic thought that further transforms the *LDC*'s notion of creation; and the fifth part is the conclusion.

2. Esse–Essentia—From Proclus's Emanation to the Creation in the *LDC*

In this section, I first review the differences between the concept of creation by Plato as well as emanation in traditional Neoplatonism and creation in the monotheistic framework; I then inspect emanation in Proclus's thought, pointing out his understanding of emanation containing elements that can be transformed in later times towards monotheistic creation. Finally, I analyze briefly how, on this basis, the *LDC* develops the two dimensions of the existence and essence of creation.

Both the creation of Demiurge in Plato's *Timaeus* and the emanation of Neoplatonism differ significantly from classical monotheistic creation. The former differs from classical monotheistic creation in that Demiurge does not have ontological primacy but is secondary to, or ancillary to, the world of ideas, and Demiurge's intentions of goodness are limited and often constrained by the material on which his work is focused (Hasker 1998).

In the traditional Neoplatonist concept of emanation, however, God or the One is the absolute transcendent, and as such, he cannot be predicated in any affirmative way—including "being"—but only in a negative way. Moreover, as we know well from this doctrine, God's relation to the world is connected by a series of different grades: intelligence, soul, and finally matter. The lower substances in the grades come out of the higher ones by emanation, which does not diminish the original higher substances, such as a spring from a fountain or light from the sun. Hence, the inferior is ontologically lower and participates in the essence of the higher. A further important feature is that the participation of higher substances in lower substances is eternal and necessary and not dependent on, or contained in, the will (Hasker 1998).

These features of emanation distinguish it from monotheistic creation in numerous significant ways: on the one hand, monotheism does not recognize an intermediary connection between God and all substances and characterizes God's direct presence and direct

action on creation; according to monotheism, God's creation must be a creation out of nothing (creatio ex nihilo), and as such, it is neither incomplete, as in Plato's Demiurge, nor out of God's nature (ex Deo), as in the case of emanation, i.e., the creator and the created must be radically distinct. In addition, monotheism holds that creation cannot entail necessity but rather the will of God, who freely and voluntarily created the world (Hasker 1998).

If we look at Proclus's theory of emanation, we will recognize that his thought has certain modifications from the traditional notion of emanation and that these changes make his thought more affirmative of the notion of creation in monotheism. This is manifested in two ways.

First, Proclus reinforces the sharp distinction between first causes and other secondary causes; for example, in Proposition 30 of *Elements of Theology*, Proclus says:

> For a term which proceeded (προϊόν) completely would have no identity with that which remained: such a term is wholly distinct from the prior. If it is to be united by any common link with its cause, it must remain in the latter as we saw that the latter remained in itself. If, on the other hand, it should remain only, without procession, it will be indistinguishable from its cause, and will not be a new thing which has arisen (ἄλλο γεγονός) while the cause remains. (Proclus 1963, pp. 34–35)

Moreover, although not all the substantiality of beings derives directly from the First Cause but rather from the plural gods according to the *Elements of Theology*, Proclus does imply in his thought that the First Cause has a certain unmediated connection with all beings (De Vogel 1966, p. 72). In this aspect, he partially departs from the traditional hierarchical theory of the doctrine of emanation.

From these two points, we can observe that there are certain elements and possibilities of transformation toward monotheistic creation in Proclus's thought: on the one hand, the One is absolutely transcendent and alien to the entities out of which it flows, and on the other hand, the One has the possibility of being directly related to all substances. After all, however, Proclus does not explicitly use the concept of "creation", let alone provide further clarification of the modalities and prescriptions of creation.

Building on Proclus's tendencies, the *LDC*, further influenced by Arab monotheistic religions (Taylor 2020, pp. 212–13), introduces the notion of creation, thus explicitly taking on monotheistic characteristics, although the creative activity of the One remains, as in Proclus's emanation, neither free nor voluntary (Taylor 2012, pp. 126–33). Even more importantly, the *LDC* defines the connotative framework of creation by making a clear distinction between being as a fact (Seinstatsache) and being's form (Seinsart) (Bertolacci 2022, p. 254; Schäfer 2017, pp. 192–93), while the creative activity of the First Cause in relation to created things equally encompasses both of these dimensions.

In Chapter VIII(IX):79 of the *LDC*, the author says: "The stability (fixio) and essence of every Intelligence is from the Pure Goodness, which is the First Cause" (Brand 1984, p. 27; Schönberger 2003, p. 20). Here, God (the First Cause, i.e., the pure Good) exerts two effects on the intelligence of the first creature: to bestow it the existence (stability) and to bestow it the essence. Therefore, the intelligence, and the soul beneath them, naturally "possess" existence and essence.

Thus, at the end of the chapter, the author of the *LDC* states that intelligence, soul, and nature are complexes (yliathim, Arabic: kullīyatun, "wholeness") (Bardenhewer 1882, p. 79) possessing existence (esse) and form (forma), and only the First Cause (God) is not a complex since He is Pure Existence (VIII(IX):90, Brand 1984, p. 28; Schönberger 2003, p. 22). In other words, "wholeness" is the opposite of "simplicity":

> And if anyone says, "The First Cause must have yliathim", we will say, "Its yliathim is its infinity and its individuality is Pure Goodness, overflowing every perfection upon Intelligence and upon the rest of things by mediation of Intelligence". (VIII(IX):91, Brand 1984, p. 28)

It is clear from this passage that the First Cause (God) is not only existence itself but also goodness itself, i.e., He does not "have" existence and does not "have" goodness. In other words, existence and goodness are not accidental to the First Cause but are Himself (Schäfer 2017, pp. 192–93). In contrast, although intelligence "possesses" all goodness (omnes bonitates), it is not goodness itself but rather only possesses it, by means of which the First Cause overflows goodness into creatures.

Furthermore, the First Cause gives goodness, or formal completeness, to other things through intelligence. Specifically speaking, the First Cause maintains the world and governs it through intelligence:

> has come to be that which maintains and governs the things that are after it and that which suspends its own power over them, only because they are not a substantial power for it; (but rather,) it is the power of substantial powers, because it is their cause. (VIII(IX):83, Brand 1984, p. 28)

Here, intelligence possesses the power (virtus) of bringing things that come after it into their proper prescriptive nature. Hence, we may say that this power is the substantial power (virtus substantialis) referring to these substances, that is, the power of the proper realization of their essence. In this way, the medieval monotheistic God–world relationship—creation, sustention, and government—is presented in the *LDC* in a neo-Platonist framework.

Therefore, it is clear that according to the *LDC*, the First Cause bestows the things of the secondary level into their proper essences (essentia) with the intermediary of the Intelligence, which is to say that, apart from directly relating to the essence of the Intelligence (by endowing it with the whole of goodness), the way in which the First Cause endows the essences of the things of the secondary level is indirect (by the intermediary of the Intelligence).

3. Avicenna's Reception of the Esse–Essentia Structure in the Creation of the *LDC*

A natural question then is whether the First Cause bestows existence (esse) to all things except intelligence in the same indirect way.

It appears that the author of *LDC* thinks so in the following passage:

> And indeed, the First Cause is neither Intelligence nor Soul nor Nature; on the contrary, it is above [Intelligence and] Soul and Nature, because it creates all things. However, it creates Intelligence without an intermediary and creates Soul and Nature and the rest of things by mediation of Intelligence. (VIII(IX):87, Brand 1984, p. 28)

Here, the First Cause "creates" the Intelligence, that is, bringing the Intelligence "creatio ex nihilo" into existence, so that the Intelligence is absolutely external to the First Cause. If we agree that creation (creare) consists of two main parts, namely, the bestowing of essence to created things and the bestowing of existence to created things, and that the First Cause's bestowing of essence to created things is accomplished with the intermediary of intelligence, as has been said above, it seems that we must also affirm, in light of this text, that the first cause's bestowing of existence is accomplished through intelligence.

If the passage above was not obvious enough, let us look at the *Liber de Causis*, III, 31–32:

> And the soul performs these operations only because it is itself an example of the higher power. This is because the First Cause created the being of Soul (esse animae) by mediation of Intelligence, and as a result Soul has come to perform a divine operation. (III:31–32, Brand 1984, pp. 21–22; Schönberger 2003, p. 6)

Here, it is stated more clearly that the being of the soul (which is a substance below intelligence) is not created directly by the First Cause but is mediated by intelligence. That is, the First Cause (God) does not directly give existence to all things apart from intelligence.

Such a doctrine, however, is contrary to the monotheistic doctrine: in this doctrine, not only does God create all things "out of nothing" so that all things are absolutely separate

from God, but it seems that God should give existence to all (at least) individual souls directly and not through any intermediary. Thus, Aquinas provides the following criticism in his commentary on the *LDC*: "Some, however, *wrongly* understanding what he [i.e., the author of the *LDC*] says here, that the first cause created the being of the soul, with the mediation of an intelligence" (Aquinas 1955, p. 21; 1996, p. 24, n78, my italics and note).

Although we cannot be sure which philosophers are directly influenced by the *LDC*, at least for Aquinas, one of those he refers to here is the important Arab philosopher Avicenna. In chapter 10 of the *Treatise on Separate Substances* (*De Substantiis Separatis*), Aquinas says that some philosophers determine the procession of things coming into being from the First Principle according to a certain order down to the lowest bodies, and "this is the position of Avicenna which seems to be presupposed in the *Book of Causes*" (Aquinas 1959, p. 89; 1968, p. 59 line 23–27).

In Aquinas's view, Avicenna accepts the Neoplatonist theory of emanation in the existential sense and argues that Avicenna reads the text in the *LDC* in this way and adopts this reading as part of his metaphysical–theological theory.

Recent research has shown, as Aquinas argues, that it is highly likely that Avicenna is indeed heavily influenced by the *LDC* (Costa 2000), even though he makes critical modifications to some of its elements, for example, on issues such as how God exists as Pure Being (Bertolacci 2022, p. 275) and the role of power in the process of creation (Lizzini 2022). In relation to the question of being in creation, if we read Avicenna's *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, Book 9, Chapter 4, we find that Avicenna accepts the idea that the First Cause (God) bestows existence on all things through intelligence (Avicenna 1980, p. 478; 2005, p. 327).

However, how does Avicenna defend this view? In *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, the main defense Avicenna provides is that the creation of the First Cause is a single, nontemporal action:

> The [. . .] First Truth [sc. the First Cause] [. . .] intellectually apprehends the order of the good in existence and how this ought to be—not [however] through an intellectual apprehension that moves from potentiality to actuality (fi'l), nor [through] an intellectual apprehension that moves (muntaqilun) from one intelligible to another (for His essence is free from what is potential in all respects [. . .]), but by ***one act*** of intellection. (Avicenna 1980, p. 478; 2005, p. 327, my italic)

Here, Avicenna argues that because of the ontological character of the First Cause, whose action of creation must be simultaneous or nontemporal, the thing that He creates must also be universally one, and only after this creation can the many come into being out of the created intelligence.

4. Aquinas's Reception of the Esse–Essentia Structure in the Creation in *Liber de Causis* and His Critique of Avicenna

This reading of the *LDC* by Avicenna, however, is criticized by Aquinas, and the most superficial reason for this is that Aquinas regards this interpretation as a departure from the monotheistic creation theory. In the *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 90, a. 2 co., Aquinas replaces the notion of "Intelligence" created by the First Cause in the *LDC* and by Avicenna with "angels" (on the equivalence of the two concepts, cf. *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 65, a. 4 co.) and accuses Avicenna of thinking that the angels (the Intelligence) are capable of producing rational souls since they are active through the power of God, and then says: "But this is quite impossible, and is against faith. For [. . .] the rational soul cannot be produced except by creation. Now, God alone can create." Aquinas then presents his position succinctly that the existence of the rational soul (e.g., the part of the soul in human reason) is necessarily created directly by God and not by means of intelligence (Aquinas 2007, p. 327).

How, then, does Aquinas himself interpret the First Cause creating the existence of the soul "through the mediation of Intelligence" in the *LDC*? Aquinas clarifies in his *Commentary on the Book of Causes* that, on one hand, the First Cause alone created the essence of the soul, while on the other hand, the soul is intellectual due to the activity of

the Intelligence, and "that this is what he [sc. the author of the *LDC*] means". Aquinas then cites the text of *LDC* III, 33: "Therefore, he says, after the First Cause created the being of the soul, it placed it as something subject to an intelligence, i.e., it made it subject to the activity of an intelligence, for the intelligence to perform its activity in it, giving it its intellectual character" (Aquinas 1955, p. 22; 1996, p. 25, n81–82, my note).

Here, we can observe that, unlike Avicenna, Aquinas reads the view in the *LDC* as that the First Cause creates the existence of the soul directly rather than indirectly by means of the intelligence. What the text calls the creation of the soul by means of intelligence is an imprecise formulation; it means nothing more than that reasonableness is an essential attribute of the soul and, thus, intelligence can operate upon it.

If we try to refute Aquinas by Avicenna's grounds that the simplicity of the First Cause necessarily requires the simplicity of His creation, Aquinas replies that there is no such necessity here:

> Moreover, if the good of the universe which consists in the distinction and order of its parts, does come from the intention of the first and universal agent, then it is necessary that the very distinction and order of the parts of the universe preexist in the intellect of the First Principle. And because things proceed from Him as from a principle with an intellect, which acts in accordance with conceived forms, we may not posit that from the First Principle—granting that it is simple in Its essence—there proceeds only one effect; and that it is from another being, according to the mode of its composition and power, there proceeds a multitude, and so on. (Aquinas 1959, p. 90; 1968, pp. 43–53, 59)

Clearly, Aquinas argues here against Avicenna's position above that the First Cause does not need an intermediary through which he bestows existence to creatures. His argument in this regard is analogical: just as a formal principle does not need an intermediary to provide a single form to a plurality of entities, the First Cause naturally does not need an intermediary to bestow existence on a plurality of entities. It is hence natural that the simplicity of the First Cause's existence does not prevent Him from conferring the plurality of existence on created beings.

In this way, we have clarified the two different paths interpreting the proposition that the First Cause creates being and essence as formulated in the *LDC* from Aquinas and Avicenna: for Avicenna, because of the simplicity with which the First Cause exists and operates, His direct creation must be simple; thus, the existence and essence that he bestows through creation must also be singular. The bestowed being and essence must also be singular, and compound multiplicity can only spring from this created singularity. Aquinas, however, argues that the soul's existence is a direct creation of God and that other rational entities do not bestow existence on the soul but act only as proximate causes to drive it into operation.

Undoubtedly, this defense of "orthodox" monotheistic beliefs by Aquinas is not simply a boring fundamentalist's simple exclusion of other views. To verify this, we only need to look at Aquinas's "Critique of Heresy", which is mentioned at the beginning of this section. This critique appears in the *Summa Theologica*, I q. 90 a. 2, whose title is "whether the soul is produced by creation (Utrum anima sit producta in esse per creationem)". What Aquinas talks about here is the human soul. Aquinas clearly does this to emphasize the character of the individual human soul as God's direct creation to demonstrate and emphasize the dignity of the individual soul and its individual relationship with God, avoiding the sola rationis of the Averroists.

5. Conclusions

This study shows that Proclus's thought tends to strengthen the distinction between the One and other beings and the direct relation of the One to all beings. The *LDC* greatly develops and enriches these tendencies, which is reflected in the delimitation of existence and essence by stating that both derive from the creation of the First Cause and in following the Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation, which holds that the First Cause creates

the existence and essence of intelligence and endows the lower beings with the two through intelligence. Everything is thus a complex of esse–essentia, and only the First Cause is the Pure Being.

By emphasizing the two separate perspectives of the creation of the First Cause—to endow existence and to endow essence—the *LDC* sets up the First Cause's relation to creation as a parallel dualistic structure: the creation of existence and the granting of formal completeness. The theoretical consequence of this is a sharp separation of "being" from "essence". This existence–essence distinction eventually became the classic paradigm of medieval metaphysics. Avicenna inherits this dualistic division and emanation's structure and defends it through the simplicity of the First Cause and first-cause actions. Thus, Avicenna does not want to abandon the sequence of realizations (Wirklichkeitsordnung), the "golden chain" (catena aurea) of Neoplatonism (Schäfer 2017, p. 192). Aquinas, in contrast, thoroughly implemented the doctrine of monotheism, interpreting the creative activity of the First Cause in the *LDC* as the direct endowing of existence to the individual soul by the First Cause (God), an interpretation that benefits his debate against Averroists.

The *LDC* is the fruit of the fusion of Neoplatonism and monotheistic beliefs. It is in the transitional place of different civilizations and is an excellent attempt at mutual understanding and exchange among different civilizations and an attempt to eliminate philosophical tensions, laying a foundation for the development and prosperity of medieval philosophy.

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God Dwelling in the Clouds: The Dionysian Idea of the Triple Divine Darkness

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Abstract: The God on Mount Sinai is the most widely used figure in Christian Negative Theology, with Dionysius Areopagita being its most famous interpreter. As Denys Turner described in his work *The Darkness of God*, the Dionysian God dwelling in the darkness has an intimate relationship with the Sun in the "Cave Allegory" of Plato's *Republic*. This paper clarifies the complex relationship between these two figures, which remains largely underexplored in Turner's book. The Dionysian God has three kinds of divine darkness: the first one stems from the Neoplatonist Porphyrius, who reinterpreted the darkness of the Cave to defend a Platonic positive view of the material world; the second one is attributed to Church Father Origen, who applied the Platonic philosophy to re-interpret the God on Mount Sinai; and finally, the last divine darkness, inspired by the Life of Moses, written by Gregory of Nyssa, which reaches the ultimate negation of any light.

Keywords: Negative Theology; Pseudo-Dionysius; Porphyrius; Origen; Gregory of Nyssa

1. Rethinking the Synthesis of Two Archetypes

Denys Turner, in his most famous work, *The Darkness of God*, suggests that the foundation of Western Christian Negative Theology is derived from two archetypes: "Allegory of the Cave" in Book 7 of Plato's *Republic* and the story of Moses' encounter with "Yahweh on Mount Sinai" in the Book of *Exodus*. The former represents a method of describing the ultimate being in terms of "light", while the latter describes it in terms of "darkness". Although these two points seem extremely contradictive, the Greek Church Fathers subtly integrated the Platonic imagery into the Exodus narrative. Turner believed the synthesis of two archetypes is based on a "dialectical" structure: inside the cave, the prisoners are living in a darkness of ignorance; outside the cave, the sunlight is so excessive as to cause the released prisoner to feel a dazzling darkness. The idea that the darkness is not the absence of light but rather its excess was appropriated by the Greek Church Fathers to interpret the darkness hovering on Mount Sinai.[1] As this paper observes, such a synthesis occurred not only among some Church Fathers, who despoiled the Greek philosophy to retell the story of Moses, but also among their contemporary Neoplatonists, who advocated the positive characteristic of the material universe through the reinterpretation of the "Cave Allegory". However, Turner's book is predominantly concerned with the development of theory in the Latin Medieval Age, treating the Cappadocian Fathers and Dionysius Areopagita as merely a preliminary stage.

While Turner's simplification fails to account for many details, I intend to extend the theoretical scope by addressing the following three points. The first point is that although the cave is described as a "prison" by Plato, it should not be regarded as a dangerous place. The scene inside the cave is built as an imitation of the outside world "as good as possible" by a Demiurge (*Timaeus* 30a). This implies that the 'darkness' ought to be regarded as

an integral component of his providential designs. The cave is not intended for eternal punishment but functions more as a juvenile correctional facility or even a mother's womb. Once the prisoner is well educated in the "darkness", he will be released to the bright outside world. This interpretation, supported by Porphyrius, marks a turning point in the evaluation of the "darkness" within the Cave. It had become a symbol of invisible divinity rather than epistemological ignorance. The second point is that God in *Exodus* was "in the darkness", but he is not the darkness—God hid its excessive brightness from Moses' earthly eyes. This perspective enables Origen to incorporate the 'Cave Allegory' into the narrative of Moses. Finally, what seems to be most easily misunderstood is the notion that Moses had become a blind man when he stepped into the darkness on Mount Sinai. However, even as literally recorded in the scriptures, he was not blind and could "see" many visions on the mountaintop. This perspective is essential for arriving at the paper's final conclusion: the concept of triple darkness of Dionysius Areopagita.

It is not difficult to discern some parallels between the "Cave Allegory" and the story of Moses. The prisoner also came out from a "hole"[2] and restored his eyesight after suffering from the dazzling darkness, and he eventually saw the "Sun" shining in the sky. For both those prisoners in the cave and the common people standing at the feet of Sinai, the divinity was no more than a distant image in the darkness, as they had never seen the light shine upon them. This paper proposes that the common structure between the two stories is the real foundation of the synthesis. Furthermore, the synthesis of light and darkness should be understood as a gradual transition from light to darkness rather than a mere oscillation between the two extremes.

2. The Divine Darkness in the Cave

There are thousands of modern commentaries on Plato's "Allegory of the Cave", but as far as we know, only a few pieces of ancient Greek philosophical works on this project. One important document among those ancient texts is *De Antro Nympharum*, written by Porphyrius, which provides us with a fascinating interpretation of the role of the cave that differs substantially from modern research perspectives, such as the political interpretations of Leo Strauss. As Nilüfer Akçay observes, this text was a great turning point in how to interpret ancient myths in Late Antiquity—"Platonic philosophers…became interested in analyzing myths in terms of symbol and enigma and in searching for their hidden meanings".[3] Porphyrius believed that both Homer and Plato witnessed a divine revelation about the cosmic structure and the fate of human souls, and without the Platonic interpretations of the Homeric Epic, no one could find the key to understanding such mysteries. Therefore, the counterpart of the Homeric *Odysseus* is the prisoner's experience in the Platonic Allegory, and both of them symbolize a return journey of the human soul to the intellectual realm.

The first half of this document focuses on exploring the symbolic meaning of the cave, showing that it represents not only the realm of sensible phenomenon but also the presence "*of invisible powers*" (τῶν ἀοράτων δυνάμεων)[4]. It is crucial to emphasize that the divine power is termed "dark" because it originates from the intelligible realm, which transcends human perception.[5] From this perspective, the darkness of the tangible universe possesses a dual significance: on the one hand, it is a material thing "*being naturally dark and foggy*" (σκοτεινὸς ὢν φύσει καὶ ἠεροειδής); on the other hand, it is "*holy and lovely*" (ἱερός καὶ ἐπέραστος), an offspring of the intellectual world[6]. An erotic image of "*generation*" (γένεσις) is applied here to explain this duality: the Matter, as a female, attracts an injection of divine male power from the Intellectual world[7]. Along with this divine injection, those souls originally abiding in the intellectual realms will come into the material universe and receive their material bodies[8].

The negative evaluation of the sensible world in the "Cave Allegory" has been sharply reversed by Porphyrius' reinterpretations, such that the horrible "material universe" becomes a place "*beautiful and lovely*" (καλός τέ ἐστι καὶ ἐπέραστος)[9]. Although Porphyrius proclaimed that it was Numenius who inspired him, some similar teachings were also seen in his teacher Plotinus' *Ennead*. Likewise, Plotinus refuted the idea that the cave is built to imprison the souls, instead insisting that it serves to keep them "in the (divine) guard" (ἐν φρουρᾷ)[10]. It could be argued that Plotinus viewed the nature of the material universe as a providential resting place for those fallen souls, a place to let them retrieve their ascending powers[11]. Considering that Porphyrius and his teacher Plotinus both shared the same attitude against the Gnostic Movement[12], it is possible to understand why they insisted on the positive characteristics of the universe since the Gnostic appropriation of "Allegory of the Cave" had threatened the legitimacy of earthly life[13].

If life in the cave is not terrible, and the darkness is as sweet as honey, then the soul does not have to escape from it in a hurry[14]. Even for those souls enjoying life in the outside world, the cave is still attractive, and those souls often return to it because of the memories of their past lives. Porphyrius rejected the soul's permanent escape from the material universe and revoked the Platonic theory of transmigration[15]. Odysseus is "*ignorant*" (ἄπειρος) of his body and the material universe but does not leave the process of material generations once and for all[16]. In this case, this paper proposes that the Porphyrian "Odysseus" is closer to the figure of Moses on Sinai than the prisoner outside since even when facing God, Moses is still ontologically somewhere in this material universe.

Despite Porphyrius is renowned for his anti-Christian speeches, such an interpretation of the Allegory can still facilitate a dialog with Christianity. Firstly, almost in the same contemporary time, the Church was also engaged in controversy with Gnostic cosmology. Secondly, Numenius, the alleged source of Porphyrian ideas, was strongly inclined to integrate Judaism and Greek Philosophy, going as far as to describe Plato as Moses among the Greeks[17]. Thirdly, when Porphyrius interpreted the relationship between the soul and the body as analogous to that between the divine power and the material universe, he directly quoted scriptural text from *Genesis* 1:2—"*as says Numenius, given through this reason the prophet (Moses) speaks, that the Pneuma of God is above the water*"[18].

Therefore, it is not surprising that his view on cosmic darkness might resonate with some Christians, including Dionysius Areopagita. One might find the identical dual explanations of cosmic darkness in Dionysian cosmology: the material universe consists of distant and faint echoes (ἀπηχήματά) of intellectual lightness[19] and there is also divine power streaming to "*the farthest of the echoes*" (τὰ ἔσχατα τῶν ἀπηχημάτων αὐτῆς)[20]. This divine power is also called "*the impalpable and invisible shadow*" (τὸν ἀναφῆ καὶ ἀόρατον γνόφον) due to its excessiveness beyond the human's sight[21]. However, a significant difference between Porphyrius and Dionysius lies in their respective objectives: Porphyrius's writing seeks to articulate the descent of divine power into the material universe, whereas Dionysius's Clouds are concerned with the divinity's transcendence beyond the material universe.

3. The Bright God Behind the Darkness

For Christian scholars in the Late Antiquity period, the Platonic works are largely incomparable to the Bible; however, "despoiling" the Platonic Philosophy to defend the Christian faith was the most important methodology for them. Origen was undoubtedly one of the most representative figures. He knew the Platonic works very well and utilized many Platonic imageries of the Allegory in his greatest work, *De Principiis*. His description of God recalls the metaphor of "two Suns" in *Republic* Book 6, which serves as a preparation for the Allegory: "*For can we possibly think that, because it is termed light, it is like the light of*

our sun? And how can there be the slightest reason for supposing that from that material light, the grounds of knowledge could be derived and the meaning of truth discovered?".[22] Similarly to the narrative sequence between *Republic* Book 6 and Book 7, an Origenian "Cave Allegory" also follows the "two Suns" metaphor. In this allegory, Origen proposed that human souls are very similar to people living in a dark place since our individual's mind (*mens nostra*) is trapped within the bar of the material body and is rendered duller and feebler (*hebetior atque obtusior*). Origen suggested that if someone had never seen a glimmer or the light of even the smallest lamp, he would not understand what light really is; alternatively, if there was a "window/hole" (*fenestra*) in the wall for light, then people could deduce the greatness of sunlight from the small ray of light leaking into the dark place[23].

While this narrative may appear to be a direct imitation of the Platonic Allegory, it is important to note that Origen's engagement with Platonic thought does not signify a compromise of his Christian faith but rather reflects a strategic apologetic approach. One of the most significant proofs of such a proposition is that the "Sun" in the Origenian allegory has a philanthropical characteristic, and this makes it different from the merciless Platonic Sun. It was previously mentioned that when the Platonic prisoner steps out of the cave, the light hurts his eyes. However, the Origenian Sun is kind to its prisoner, even dimming itself for him: "*This brightness falls softly and gently on the tender and weak eyes of mortal man and little by little trains and accustoms them, as it were, to bear the light in its clearness…*"[24]. This philanthropic expression greatly influenced Dionysius Areopagita and a similar statement can also be found in *Corpus Dionysiacum*[25]*:* "*At first it deals out the light in small amounts and then, as the wish and the longing for light begin to grow, it gives more and more of itself, shining ever more abundantly on them because they 'loved much', and always it keeps urging them onward and upward as their capacity permits*".[26]

Unlike Porphyrius, Origen was unable to associate "darkness" with invisible divinity. He interpreted darkness (σκότος) merely as a symbolic representation of human ignorance, positing that this condition will not endure forever but rather a temporary phenomenon. As long as we could get through the Logos, *mediator hominum ac lucis, the* ineffable and agnostic deity would immediately manifest as an intelligible entity[27]. Origen did not mention the Incarnation of Logos in this epistemological process, for he believed that the second hypostasis of Trinity has nothing sensible nor corporal in common with the physical sunlight[28]. He posited that the material body is the fundamental cause of human ignorance, asserting that upon the soul's attainment of perfection, the body would "no longer be impeded with these bodily senses" (*nequaquam jam ultra istis carnalibus sensibus impedita*) and this spiritual perfection cannot even be completed "in this life" (*in hac vita*)[29]. Therefore, even though Moses had already seen divine visions on the top of Sinai, he could only know God "partly (ex parte)" since he was still a living person[30].

Dionysius diverged from Origen's ascetic perspective on the body, instead advocating that the soul derives profound benefit from the harmonious integration of the bodily senses with the intellect. The "bodily" ignorance arises not from the corporeal substance itself (for the bodily nature itself is not a source of evil or ignorance[31]) but rather from the ontological dissonance between the mind and the material body. According to this perspective, Dionysius embraced a kind of epistemological symbolicism, namely "Symbolic Theology", that spiritual truths could be discerned through physical beings. This is grounded in his belief that divine symbols, embedded within the material world, possess a mystagogical power capable of reconciling the body–mind dichotomy and guiding the soul in its ascent along the heavenly ladder. Thus, in the Dionysian theory, the divine darkness encountered by Moses is never a veil obscuring knowledge but rather a catalyst that provokes Moses to delve into a deeper mystical inquiry—an interpretive insight absent in Origen's view[32].

4. The Unknown God in the Darkness

The most well-known description of the divine darkness in Christian literature, "*God made darkness his concealment*" (τὸν θέμενον «σκότος ἀποκρυφὴν αὐτοῦ»)[33], is from the shortest treatise of *Corpus Dionysiacum*, *De Mystica Theologia*. The story of Moses' ascension is indispensable here: in obedience to divine instruction, he and a chosen group of priests purified themselves and withdrew from the common community. When Moses came to "*the summit of the divine upwardness*" (ἐπὶ τὴν ἀκρότητα τῶν θείων ἀναβάσεων), "*He is released from the visible being and the visual sense, and plunges into the shadow of ignorance which is truly mystical*".[34]

Turner asserts that Moses in his contemplation of the divine was suffering a great pain and he describes it as exceeding the pains of childbirth[35]. Yet, I contend that his view is not only an overstatement but also inconsistent with the Greek Patristic texts he references. Turner and many other scholars have admitted that the predecessor of the Dionysian description of Moses' ascension is *de Vita Moysis*[36], a book written by a Cappadocian Father Gregory of Nyssa. However, it is noteworthy that none of these Church Fathers, in their respective writings, mention that Moses had suffered any form of pain. To be more precise, Gregory did not address Moses' subjective feelings in the *Vita*, and Dionysius addressed that the steep way up was "*difficult*" (δυσπρόσιτον)[37] for Moses, but the bitterness of fatigue was soon overcome by the joy of contemplating God[38].

In the *Vita*, Gregory asked his readers why Moses was able to see (ἰδεῖν) God in the shadow when he arrived at the mountaintop. He proposed a possible answer: that it is Moses' intelligent ability to believe (δοκεῖν) that he has seen God, even without any proof from his bodily senses[39]. Further, Gregory defined the divine "contemplation" as a purely mental activity that is not affected by sight or hearing, nor is it comprehended by any of the customary perceptions of the mind[40]. And if Dionysius had read both Gregory and Porphyrius, then we might presume that he could have equated "the ignorance of Moses" with "the ignorance of Odysseus"[41]—when Odysseus is ashore, he soon becomes someone "*who has withered the body, thrown away all the dregs and turned away from the sensible perceptions*"[42]. If these documents indeed served as the writing sources for *De Mystica Theologia*, we might deduce that the ignorance of Moses in the Dionysian context refers not only to an ignorance of God, as many scholars have assumed, but also to an ignorance of his own body[43].

Furthermore, Gregory distinguishes between two kinds of darkness: the first is the ignorance of intellectual knowledge resulting from the limitations of the body, and the second is the ultimate transcendence of the divine Ousia, which lies beyond the grasp of human intelligence, for "*the divine nature is uncontemplated*" (τὸ τῆς θείας φύσεως ἀθεώρητον)[44]. Like the prisoner in Plato's "Allegory of the Cave", Moses was also exposed to the intelligible "sunlight" after transcending his physical body. However, unlike the prisoner's direct vision of the Sun, the "Sun" in Moses' case, though radiant, remained beyond his visual perception. Within the Origenian framework, Moses only "saw" God partially, whereas the Gregorian Moses never attained a vision of the divine nature. The Gregorian Moses might have believed that he had glimpsed God at some point, but he soon realized that his ascent toward the divine was an endless journey. Each time he climbed a step higher on the heavenly ladder, he would inevitably discover yet another step awaiting him[45]. As we shall see later, Dionysius also followed this Gregorian framework, asserting that what Moses contemplated was not God Himself (for He is beyond contemplation) but rather the place where He dwells[46].

5. The Ultimate Darkness of Incarnation

In the Gospel, according to Matthew, Jesus underwent transfiguration on a small mountain and then summoned Moses to his side before Peter and Jacob; however, in the Gregorian *Vita,* they had already met each other at the top of Sinai. Once Moses entered into the darkness, he saw "*a tabernacle not made with hand*" (ἡ ἀχειροποίητος σκηνή)[47], a symbol signifying that Christ is "*the divine power and divine Sophia*" (ἡ θεοῦ δύναμις καὶ θεοῦ σοφία)[48]. It should be noted that this explanation of Moses' visions is the most critical part of the Gregorian *Vita*, but Dionysius appears to have deliberately avoided replicating this portion in his works.[49] I believe Dionysius rejected the Gregorian concept of "the heavenly tabernacle" not only due to its lack of biblical textual support but also because he did not align with Gregorian Christology. The description of Moses' experience in *De Mystica Theologia* is well known to many scholars, but few have noted that it also appears in two other Dionysian treatises: *De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia* and *De Coelesti Hierarchia*[50]. In the former, Moses saw "*the hierarchical image of types according to the Law shown forth to him (Moses) on Sinai*"[51]; in the latter, according to the biblical texts, it was the Angels who gave the Law to Moses[52]. While these two Dionysian texts closely parallel their counterpart in the Gregorian Vita, the relationship between Christology and the "hierarchical image" is still absent here.

Another evidence of this divergence is that Gregory argued that Christ is "an inapproachable light" in the *Contra Eunomium*[53], but Dionysius never explicitly applied such a typology in his works[54]. Although Gregory said that Christ's divinity has been concealed by the screen of our (human) nature (τῷ προκαλύμματι τῆς φύσεως ἡμῶν ἐνεκρύφθη τὸ θεῖον), it is still a bright flame or light flowing downward (ῥέουσαν ἐπὶ τὸ κάτω) from heaven[55]. However, Dionysius preferred to depict Christ in terms of "darkness". The divinity of Christ is hidden behind his manifestation as a human (κρύφιος ἐστι καὶ μετὰ τὴν ἔκφασιν); in other words, He hides himself (κέκρυπται)[56]. It should be noted that the word "hidden" is virtually equivalent to "hidden-mysterious" (κρύφιομύστος), a term employed to depict God on Sinai by Dionysius[57]. Thus, we can infer that Dionysius envisions a parallel between the "God on Sinai" and the Incarnation of Christ: the former conceals Himself within a dark cloud to veil His brightness, while the latter represents a spiritual light cloaked within a material body.

As Radde-Gallwitz proved, Gregory was somewhat influenced by a combination of the Aristotelian view and Pseudo-Basil's distinction between divine and human natures[58]. As such, he supported an extreme position of the flesh to avoid the charge of two Christs[59]. It is indeed unfair to require Gregory to set up a Christology that is generally received by later Christians; however, his position still seems to include a dangerous slope into the denial of the reality of Christ's body. Dionysius seems to put much more emphasis on the quality of Christ's human body because "the Christ in darkness" really needs a material body to cover his excessive light. Although there is no direct statement about the nature of the body of Christ in *Corpus Dionysiacum*, an indirect instance can still show how Dionysius dealt with it. He believed that Jesus had provided us with a perfect example of human life, including "a whole resurrection" (ὁλικὴ ἀνάστασις). Such a resurrection does not involve the merging of the human body with other substances; instead, it will return the original body to its owner. On this basis, it is imperative to conclude that Christ must have a real corporeal body akin to ours.

Given the above, the figurative transmutation from the bright Sun of "Allegory of the Cave" to the dark cloud on the Sinai ended in the Dionysian Christological darkness. This paper argues that the whole process went through three stages: First, the Porphyrian reinterpretation of the cosmological darkness, which sanctifies the darkness of the material universe as a divine presence rather than a privation of goodness. Second, the philanthropical

description of God in Origenism put a bright God into the darkness[60]. Third, compared to the Gregorian statement in the *Vita* that Christ in potentiality (δύναμις) is something heavenly, Dionysius prefers to describe Jesus as a theanthropic reality (τὴν θεανδρικὴν ἐνέργειαν) whose nature is always hidden[61]. This metaphorical reversion of Christology puts a veil on a bright Christ.

Accordingly, this paper also attempts to argue that *De Mystica Theologia* is not to be taken as the culmination of the whole *Corpus Dionysiacum*. In his later reflections[62], Turner noted that certain modern scholars have overestimated the importance of *De Mystica Theologia*, shaped by the conventional Latin interpretation that "the 'mystical theology', which is the subject of the last Dionysian book"[63]. However, differing from this Latin traditional view of the *De Mystica Theologia*, Dionysius himself had already said that "*the theurgy (the divine work) is the summit of theologies*" (ἔστι τῆς θεολογίας ἡ θεουργία συγκεφαλαίωσις)[64]. According to this statement, *De Mystica* serves to tell people that God is uncontemplatable—they can still feel Him through the divine symbols of liturgical practices recorded in *De Ecclesiastica*[65]. These symbols mediate the immaterial into the material realm, functioning much like a dimmer that modulates sunlight. More than that, Dionysius believed that the ecclesiastical liturgy (the symbols of the Christian rites in the New Testament) is superior to Moses' earthly tabernacle (the symbols of the Jewish rites in the Old Testament) because the former is an imitation of the Incarnation and the latter is of the Law given by angels[66]. The former is a deeper darkness (more mysterious) than the latter.

In conclusion, it is evident that early Christian thinkers preceding Dionysius, such as Origen and Gregory, were influenced to some degree by Platonic allegory, which made them reluctant to affirm the positive characteristics of Christ's body. Thus, in their conception, God is essentially radiant, albeit His divine brilliance is profoundly dimmed by the constraints of the material body. It is perhaps only within the Dionysian framework of the "triple darkness" that any association with brightness is entirely precluded: God is the source of an invisible "dark" power that underlies the shadowy universe; He dwells in the "darkness" beyond the intelligible realm, as exemplified in the story of Moses; and when He descends into the material world, He even veils Himself in the "darkness" of a physical body. In brief, the God of Dionysius perpetually abides within this triple darkness[67].

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Notes

1 Turner (2008, pp. 11–18).

2 *Exodus* 33:20–23. Moses asked God for a face-to-face meeting, but God put him "into an opening hole of [a] rock" (εἰς ὀπὴν τῆς πέτρας) to let him see his rear. As I will expand later in this paper, this verse greatly inspired Origen to draw a connection between the story of Moses and the "Allegory of the Cave".

3 Akçay (2019, pp. 10–11).

4 Porphyrius (1969). My translation referenced Lambarton's work, though with some modifications. Lamberton (1983). Porphyry: On The Cave of the Nymphs. New York: Station Hill Press.

5 Ibid, 9.8.

6 Ibid, 12.5–6.

7 Ibid, 16.11–17.1.

8 Ibid, 10–11.

9 Ibid, 6.3.
10 Plotinus (1989, IV.8.1.33).
11 Ibid, IV.8.3–4.
12 Rist (1996, pp. 154–58).
13 Turner (2001, p. 84).
14 Porphyrius (1969, 16).
15 Smith (1974, pp. 56–68).
16 Porphyrius (1969, 34.6–35.1).
17 Guthrie (1917, p. 2).
18 Porphyrius (1969, 10.10–13). ὡς φησὶν ὁ Νουμήνιος, διὰ τοῦτο λέγων καὶ τὸν προφήτην εἰρηκέναι ἐμφέρεσθαι ἐπάνω τοῦ ὕδατος θεοῦ πνεῦμα…The prophet is Moses.
19 Dionysius Areopagita (1990, 144b, De Coelesti Hierarchia; 868c, De Divinis Nominibus).
20 Ibid, 892a.
21 Ibid, 869a.
22 Origen (1913, vol. 1, I.1).
23 Ibid, vol. 1, I.5–6.
24 Ibid, vol. 1, II.7.
25 Dionysius Areopagita might have a great chance to read Origen's works. See Suchla (2008, p. 23).
26 Dionysius Areopagita (1990, De Divinis Nominibus, 700d–701a).
27 Heine (1989, Book 2, pp. 140–41).
28 Ibid, vol. 1, II.6. Verbum enim est filius, et ideo nihil in eo sensibile intellegendum est; sapientia est, et in sapientia nihil corporeum suspicandum est; … sed nihil habet commune ad solis huius lumen.
29 Ibid, vol. 2, II.11.6.7.
30 Origen (1913, vol. 2, IV. 3).
31 Ibid, 728c–728d.
32 Meredith (1995, pp. 1–14).
33 Dionysius Areopagita (1990, De Mystica Theologia, 1000a).
34 Ibid, 1000d–1001a. αὐτῶν ἀπολύεται τῶν ὁρωμένων καὶ τῶν ὁρώντων καὶ εἰς τον γνόφον τῆς ἀγνωσίας εἰσδύνει τὸν ὄντως μυστικόν.
35 Turner (2008, p. 18).
36 Turner (2008, p. 17). See also (Louth 2001; Wear and Dillon 2007, pp. 119–20).
37 Gregory of Nyssa (1964b, II.84.21–22).
38 Ibid, II.82.18–83.7.
39 Ibid, II.86–87.
40 Ibid, II.84.8–11. We may experience a sense of déjà vu regarding Origen's aforementioned interpretations.
41 As Salvatore Lilla observes, Dionysius and Porphyrius share a similar usage of ἀνοησία. Lilla (1997, pp. 131–32).
42 Porphyrius (1969, 34.3–4). κάρψαντα τὸ σῶμα καὶ πᾶν περίττωμα ἀποβαλόντα καὶ τὰς αἰσθήσεις ἀποστραφέντα…It is interesting that Moses also came across the Red Sea.
43 Dionysius Areopagita (1990, De Mystica Theologia, 1033c). Dionysius suggested that a spiritual ascension of the soul is out of the bodily limits.
44 Gregory of Nyssa (1964b, II.87.1)
45 Gregory of Nyssa (1964b, II.113.3–9). See also Dionysius Areopagita (1990, De Divinis Nominibus, 680c–d).
46 Dionysius Areopagita (1990, De Mystica Theologia, 1000d). θεωρεῖ δὲ οὐκ αὐτόν (ἀθέατος γάρ), ἀλλὰ τὸν τόπον, οὗ ἔστη.
47 Ibid, II.89.15.
48 Ibid, II.91.15.
49 See also in Gregory of Nyssa (1964a, 299.19–20). Father dwells in the Son, who is the light inaccessible.
50 Sarah and Dillon believe that the key to understanding the description of Moses in *Mystical Theology* is the transcendence of divine darkness. Wear and Dillon (2007, pp. 121–25). Louth mentions the divine visions of Moses, but not in *De Ecclesiastical Hierarchies*. Louth (2001, pp. 99–100).
51 Dionysius Areopagita (1990, De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia, 501c). τὴν κατὰ νόμον ἱεραρχίαν εἰκόνα τύπου δειχθέντος αὐτῷ κατὰ τό Σίναιον…
52 Dionysius Areopagita (1990, De Coelesti Hierarchia, 180b). See also, Acts 7:38, 53; Gal 3:19, Heb 2:2.
53 Leemans and Cassin (2014, pp. 223–25).
54 Dionysius Areopagita (1990, De Divinis Nominibus, 708d; Epistula 5, 1073a). Dionysius did not accept the Gregorian typology, but he expressed that Jesus is a source of all "Hierarchies", including both the heavenly and earthly ones.

55 Gregory of Nyssa (2019, 24.3-4). Gregory seems unable to cast off the yoke of Origenism. See also, Barnes (2001, p. 287).
56 Dionysius Areopagita (1990, Epistula 3, 1069b). This is a theory of Kenosis. Christ is a light, but he hides his excessive light with his material body.
57 Dionysius Areopagita (1990, De Mystica Theolgia, 997b).
58 Leemans and Cassin (2014, 297).
59 As Karl Holl saw…Gregory had to go to the extreme of positing "Aufhebung der menschlichen Natur in die göttliche" (a complete overcoming of human nature into the divine). Leemans and Cassin (2014, p. 308).
60 Russell (2004, pp. 152–53). For Origen, the body of Christ is a kind of spiritual being. The intellectual contemplation is the only way to God.
61 Dionysius Areopagita (1990, Epistula 4, 1069b-1072c).
62 Turner (2005, pp. 428–40).
63 The theory proposed by Loius Bouyer could serve as the best model for explaining the Latin traditional notion. Bouyer (1963, p. 405).
64 Dionysius Areopagita (1990, De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia, 432b).
65 Ibid, 376c.
66 Ibid, 501c.
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Article

Philosophy and Religion in the Political Thought of Alfarabi

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Abstract: Philosophy and religion were the two important sources of knowledge for medieval Arab Muslim polymaths. Owing to the difference between the nature of philosophy and religion, the interplay between philosophy and religion often takes the form of conflict in medieval Muslim thought as exemplified by the Al-Ghazali versus Averroes (Ibn Rusd) polemic. Unlike the Al-Ghazali versus Averroes (Ibn Rushd) polemic, the interplay between philosophy and religion in the political philosophy of Abu Nasr Alfarabi takes the form of harmonious co-existence. Although, for Alfarabi, religion is an inferior form of knowledge as compared to philosophy, the present article will show that philosophy and religion play equally significant roles in Alfarabi's virtuous city and that in the absence of either philosophy or religion, the political system proposed by Alfarabi cannot exist.

Keywords: Alfarabi; philosophy; religion; political philosophy; virtuous city; medieval Arab philosophy

1. Introduction

There are three major historical events due to which Greek philosophy reached the medieval Muslim world: (1) the Christianization of the Roman empire, (2) Persia becoming the new breeding ground for Greek philosophy, and (3) Muslim conquests and the Arabic translation movement (Ali 2022a). Muslims' encounter with Greek philosophy is one of the significant events in the history of philosophy. Because medieval Muslims were the followers of monotheistic religion they already had Islam as a source of knowledge which is derived from divine revelation. When the Greek philosophical corpus reached them, philosophy became the second source of knowledge for them which is created through reason and rational thinking.

Scholars hold different views regarding the influence of philosophy and religion on medieval Muslim thought. One group of scholars attempts to tone down the influence of Islamic religion or theology on medieval Muslim thought and argues that Greek philosophy is the decisive factor that shaped medieval Muslim thought. Leaman is one of the proponents of this approach. According to Leaman (1980, pp. 525–38), Greeks taught the Arabs new ways of thinking and influenced them in politics, metaphysics, ethics, and logic. Leaman adds that medieval Muslim thinkers deal with philosophy as the cornerstone of their work, and the issues in philosophy are different from those in theology. They (medieval Muslim thinkers) dealt with philosophy, not religion. Dimitri Gutas (2002, pp. 5–25) also rejects various approaches which see medieval Muslim thought through the prism of Islamic religion and theology. He concludes that medieval Muslim thinkers were interested in nothing other than philosophy. Similarly, Walzer (2007, pp. 108–33) sees medieval Muslim thought as a continuation of Greek philosophy. He argues that almost all medieval Muslim concepts and ideas are derived from Greek philosophy. Likewise, Walker (2005, pp. 85–101) comments that the encounter of Islamic thought with ancient Greek science and philosophy is noteworthy as the influence on Islamic culture of various modes of Greek thinking, primarily in its connection with philosophy, was deep and profound.

Another group of scholars tries to tone down the influence of Greek philosophy on medieval Muslim thought and views Islamic theology or religion as the decisive factor that

shaped medieval Muslim thought. Nasr (1996, pp. 68–90) sees the "Quran and Hadith as the sources of inspiration" for medieval Muslim thought. Similarly, Erwin Rosenthal also emphasizes the influence of Islamic theology on medieval Muslim thought. According to Rosenthal (1958, pp. 1–12), Muslim polymaths deemed philosophy in contrast with theology; one was based on revelation and the other on mythology, and because of the limitations imposed by theology, they were incapable of understanding philosophy correctly. Leo Strauss and his followers argue that medieval Muslim thinkers attempted to align their views with the Islamic theological view. Strauss (1945, 1989) suggests that Muslim polymaths lived and worked in a hostile environment and, therefore, they were bound to present their views "in conformity with Islamic religion". Charles Butterworth also proposes the same view, particularly about Islamic political philosophy. He (Butterworth 1972, p. 187) argues that "Islamic political philosophy has always been pursued in a setting where great care had to be taken to avoid violating the revelations and traditions accepted by the Islamic community".

Although scholars debate the relative influence of Greek philosophy and Islamic theology on medieval Muslim thought, the impact of either philosophy or religion on medieval Muslim thought cannot be utterly denied. Philosophy and religion, both, attempt to address the same social, political, ethical, metaphysical, and cosmological questions. Therefore, owing to the difference between the nature of philosophy and religion, the interplay between philosophy and religion often takes the form of conflict in medieval Muslim thought as exemplified by the Al-Ghazali (2000) versus Averroes (1987) polemic.[1] However, unlike the Al-Ghazali versus Averroes (Ibn Rushd) polemic, the interplay between philosophy and religion in the political philosophy of Abu Nasr Alfarabi takes the form of harmonious co-existence. Abu Nasr Alfarabi was one of the most prolific and eminent 10th-century medieval Muslim philosophers who is considered the founder of Islamic Neoplatonism and political philosophy (Fakhry 2002, pp. 2–4).[2] Alfarabi proposes his political system in the form of his theory of the virtuous mainly in his political treatise *Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fādila* (Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City). The present article attempts to analyze the role and function of philosophy and religion in the political system proposed by Alfarabi. Since Alfarabi's understanding of philosophy and religion is quite different from the traditional view, before any discussion about the role and function of philosophy and religion in the virtuous city of Alfarabi it is essential to understand Alfarabi's views about philosophy and religion. Therefore, after the introduction, Section 2 of the article will explore the views of Alfarabi about religion, philosophy, and their mutual relation as presented in his writings. Section 2 of the article will show that Alfarabi views religion as the symbolic imitation of the philosophical truth. For him, philosophy, the knowledge of things as they are, is a superior form of knowledge and only the gifted superior minds of the philosophers are capable of acquiring it. On the other hand, he views religion, the knowledge of the symbolic representation of things as they are, as an inferior form of knowledge as compared to philosophy which, according to him, is suitable for the inferior minds of the common masses. Despite the fact that he views religion as an inferior form of knowledge suitable for the inferior intellect of the common masses, Section 3 of the article will show that Alfarabi makes religion, in addition to philosophy, an equally significant source of the knowledge of the ruler of his virtuous city. Unlike the philosopher-king of Plato's *Republic*, the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city is a philosopher-prophet who receives divine revelations from God. In addition to the philosophical knowledge associated with the rational faculty of the soul, Alfarabi makes it essential for the ruler of his virtuous city to acquire religious knowledge through divine revelations. This situation leads us to an obvious and important question: if Alfarabi views religion as an inferior form of knowledge suitable for the inferior intellects of the common masses, why does he make it necessary for the ruler of his virtuous city to acquire religious knowledge in addition to the superior philosophical knowledge? I will attempt to answer this question in Section 4 of this article. The virtuous city of Alfarabi consists of philosophers and non-philosophers. I will argue in Section 4 that the ruler of Alfarabi's

virtuous city needs philosophy to rule the philosophers, whereas he needs religion to rule the non-philosophers of the virtuous city. In Section 5 of the article, I will conclude that although, for Alfarabi, religion is an inferior form of knowledge as compared to philosophy, philosophy and religion play equally significant roles in the political system proposed by Alfarabi. The political system proposed by Alfarabi can neither exist nor function properly in the absence of either philosophy or religion.

2. Alfarabi's Views on Philosophy and Religion

Alfarabi explains the nature of philosophy, religion, and their mutual relationship in chapter 17 of his political treatise, *Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fādila*. According to Alfarabi (1985, pp. 279–85), philosophy is the knowledge of things as they really are, the ultimate truth. This knowledge can only be obtained through strict demonstrations and insight. To know things as they really are, the ultimate truth, one must possess a superior mind gifted with the capacity to know the ultimate truth. Thus, Alfarabi (1985, p. 279) tells us that only the philosophers and "those who are close to the philosophers" can know the truth. While philosophers know the truth "through strict demonstrations and their own insight", the people who are close to the philosophers know it "through the insight of the philosophers" by "following them, assenting to their views and trusting them".

The things as they really are can be represented through symbols. This symbolic representation of things as they really are, according to Alfarabi (1985, p. 281), is religion. In other words, for Alfarabi, religion is the symbolic representation of philosophy. Alfarabi (1985, pp. 279–83) explains that those who are not philosophers or close to the philosophers lack the capacity to know things as they really are, but they can "know them through symbols which reproduce them by imitation" (Religion). The symbols used to reproduce the things as they really are for a specific nation are those which are best known to that specific nation. Since what is best known varies among nations, the symbols used to reproduce the truth vary among nations. This explains the existence of different religions among nations. Alfarabi ranks religions on the basis of the closeness or remoteness of the symbols that constitute a religion to the things as they really are or the truth. The closer the symbols of a religion that imitate the truth are to the truth, the higher rank it holds among the religions.

It is well established from Alfarabi's writings and other relevant secondary literature that Alfarabi subordinates religion to philosophy and considers the knowledge of the philosophers to be superior. In *Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fādila*, Alfarabi (1985, pp. 279–81) explicitly states that "the knowledge of the philosophers [philosophy] is undoubtedly more excellent" as compared to the knowledge of the symbolic representation of philosophy, religion. In his other works, *The Political Regime* and *The Book of Religion*, he expresses the same views about the relationship between philosophy and religion (Alfarabi 2011a, pp. 24–35; Alfarabi 2011b, pp. 36–55). In *The Book of Religion*, Alfarabi argues that there are two parts of religion: one, the theoretical part; two, the practical part. He explicitly adds that "the two parts of which religion consists are subordinate to philosophy" (Alfarabi 2011a, p. 27). Likewise, in his book, *The Attainment of Happiness*, Alfarabi is more explicit about the relationship between philosophy and theology. He argues:

> "*When one acquires knowledge of the beings or receives instruction in them, if he perceives their ideas themselves with his intellect, and his assent to them is by means of certain demonstration, then the science that comprises these cognitions is philosophy. But if they are known by imagining them through similitudes that imitate them, and assent to what is imagined of them is caused by persuasive methods, then the ancients call what comprises these cognitions "religion" . . . . religion is an imitation of philosophy . . . . In everything of which philosophy gives an account based on intellectual perception or conception, religion gives an account based on imagination . . . Finally, philosophy is prior to religion in time*" (Alfarabi 2011c, pp. 68–69).

In addition to the works of Alfarabi, Alfarabi's views on the relationship between philosophy and religion are well documented in the secondary literature. According to

Fakhry (2002, p. 14), in his discussion about the relation of philosophy to religion, Alfarabi affirms "the pre-eminence of the former and argues that, to the extent a given religion is farther from philosophy, the farther it is from truth". Similarly, Walzer (1985, p. 14) argues that Alfarabi "is altogether no enemy of religion in its Hebraic or any other form as long as it remains subordinate to philosophy; its appeal is restricted to one group of people whereas philosophical truth is universally valid".

Alfarabi (1985, p. 281) argues that it is not possible to find any "ground for disagreement by argument" in philosophical knowledge because it is "known through strict demonstrations". However, it is possible to find grounds for objection on religion because, in religion, the truth is known through the symbols which imitate the truth. The farther the symbols of a religion that imitate the truth are from the truth, the more obvious the grounds for objection on that religion are and, thus, the easier it is to find those grounds for objection. In this context, Alfarabi explains the ascent of an individual from an inferior religion to a superior one and, possibly, from religion to philosophy provided that this individual seeks the right path, possesses the intellectual capacity, and finds grounds for objection on the religion he has:

> "*When one of them rejects anything as false, he will be lifted towards a better symbol which is nearer to the truth and is not open to that objection; and if he is satisfied with it, he will be left where he is. When that better symbol is also rejected by him as false, he will be lifted to another rank, and if he is then satisfied with it, he will be left where he is. Whenever a symbol of a given standard is rejected by him as false, he will be lifted to a higher rank, but when he rejects all the symbols as false and has the strength and gift to understand the truth, he will be made to know the truth and will be placed into the class of those who take the philosophers as their authorities. If he is not yet satisfied with that and desires to acquire philosophical wisdom and has himself the strength and gift for it, he will be made to know it*" (Alfarabi 1985, pp. 281–83).

In his *Ihsa al-Ulum* (Enumeration of the Sciences), Alfarabi expresses his views about the conflict between philosophy and religion. According to Alfarabi (2004, pp. 81–84), the followers of a religion see a conflict between their religion and philosophy just because they lack the awareness of the fact that the principles of their religion are nothing more than the symbolic representation of the philosophical principles. This lack of awareness often results in animosity between religion and philosophy. In this situation, philosophers are compelled to explain the relation between philosophy and religion to the religionists. They are compelled to confront the religionists and assure them that they are confronting the claim that there is any sort of contradiction between philosophy and religion, not the religion.

3. The Superior Knowledge of Alfarabi's Virtuous Ruler: Philosophy and Religion

In *Mabādiʾ ārāʾ ahl al-madīna al-fādila*, Alfarabi proposes his theory of the virtuous city. According to Alfarabi (1985, p. 231), the virtuous city is a city "in which people aim through association at co-operating for the things by which felicity in its real and true sense can be attained". Thus, the purpose of association in Alfarabi's virtuous city is the attainment of "felicity in its real and true sense". The real and true felicity, Alfarabi (1985, pp. 205–7) argues, is the utmost perfection of the soul "where it is in no need of matter for its support, since it becomes one of the incorporeal things and of the immaterial substances and remains in that state continuously forever". In Alfarabi's virtuous city, the real and true felicity is attained through virtuous actions. It is the virtuous ruler of Alfarabi who establishes the virtuous actions in the virtuous city and leads the people toward the attainment of real and true felicity. To do so, Alfarabi's virtuous ruler must possess superior knowledge which, among other things, includes: (a) the knowledge of the real and true felicity as distinguished from the presumed felicity[3]; (b) the knowledge of the right path which leads to true felicity; and (c) the knowledge of the actions which are conducive for the attainment of true felicity. The superior knowledge of Alfarabi's virtuous ruler entitles him to the position and authority as ruler. There are two sources of the superior knowledge

of Alfarabi's virtuous ruler: one, reason, which is associated with the rational faculty of the soul; and two, divine revelation, which is associated with the imaginative faculty of the soul. The knowledge obtained by Alfarabi's virtuous ruler through the rational faculty of the soul is philosophical knowledge, whereas the knowledge obtained by him through the imaginative faculty of the soul is religious knowledge.

Reason or the rational faculty of the soul, according to Alfarabi (1985, p. 165), is that faculty by which one knows the "intelligibles", "grasps the arts and the sciences", and "distinguishes between good and evil". It consists of two parts: one, the theoretical rational faculty, the faculty by which one obtains the knowledge of the things that cannot be created or altered by human agency; and two, the practical rational faculty, the faculty by which one obtains the knowledge of the things that can be created or altered by human agency (Alfarabi 1952, p. 98). The virtuous ruler of Alfarabi must possess the most perfect rational faculty. That is, his rational faculty must be actually intellect and actually intelligible. However, as the rational faculty is a "disposition in matter", it is only "potentially intellect" and "potentially intelligible". Alfarabi explains the transformation of the rational faculty from "potentiality" to "actuality" with the help of the imagery of the sun. It seems that Alfarabi has borrowed this imagery of the sun from Plato's *Republic*. Like Plato (1991, pp. 187–89), Alfarabi (1985, pp. 201–3) tells us that, in the absence of sunlight, the eyesight is only potentially sight and the colors are only potentially seeable. The sun provides light which makes the faculty of sight actually seeing and the colors actually seen. Likewise, there is an agent, corresponding to the sun in the imagery of the sun, that provides something to the rational faculty, corresponding to the sunlight. In this way, all potentially intelligible things become actually intelligible and the rational faculty is transformed from potentially intellect and potentially intelligible to actual intellect and actually intelligible. Alfarabi identifies this agent as the active intellect. According to Alfarabi's theory of emanation, ten intellects emanate from the highest metaphysical principle, the First.[4] The active intellect is the tenth intellect that emanates from the First. The emanation from the First through the mediation of the active intellect into the rational faculty of the ruler enables him to attain philosophical knowledge, the knowledge of things as they really are.

On the other hand, the imaginative faculty or the faculty of representation, according to Alfarabi (1985, p. 165), is that faculty by which we preserve the imprints of things sensed by the five senses. However, this faculty is not just a storeroom for the sensibles. Rather, it actively connects and disconnects the sensibles stored in it in various ways. In addition to this, perhaps the most important activity of this faculty is "reproductive imitation" (mimesis). Reproductive imitation is the activity of the faculty of representation by which it imitates and simulates the intelligibles, the sensibles, the appetitive faculty, the nutritive faculty, and the temperament of the body through the imprints of the sensibles stored in it (Alfarabi 1985, pp. 211–13). In addition to the most perfect rational faculty, the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city must possess an imaginative faculty that has attained its utmost perfection. This imaginative faculty of utmost perfection enables the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city to receive prophecy or prophetic knowledge. Alfarabi (1985, pp. 219–25) explains that the perfect imaginative faculty sometimes receives the intelligibles and the particulars from the active intellect whose proper place is in the theoretical reason and the practical reason, respectively. However, the imaginative faculty does not have the capacity to receive the knowledge of the things as they are. Therefore, it imitates them through the sensibles stored in it and receives their symbolic imitation which constitutes the religious knowledge. The symbolic imitation of the intelligibles received from the active intellect by the perfect imaginative faculty of the ruler provides the ruler with the prophecy about the divine things, whereas the symbolic imitation of the particulars received from the active intellect by the perfect imaginative faculty of the ruler gives him the prophecy about the present and future events. Thus, the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city is a philosopher-prophet who not only possesses the knowledge of the things as they are (the philosophical knowledge) but also the knowledge of the symbolic imitation of the things as they are (the religious knowledge).

4. The Function of Philosophy and Religion in the Political System of Alfarabi

It is clear that Alfarabi views philosophy as the superior form of knowledge which can only be acquired by the philosophers since only they possess the superior intellectual capacity for acquiring superior knowledge. It is also clear that he views religion as an inferior form of knowledge as compared to philosophy which is suitable for the common masses who possess an inferior intellectual capacity as compared to that of the philosophers and can only know the symbolic imitation of philosophical knowledge. Notwithstanding the inferior nature of religion, Alfarabi gives an equally significant and central role to religion in the political system proposed by him. Unlike the philosopher-king of Plato, the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city is a philosopher-prophet who is endowed with divine revelations. In addition to the philosophical knowledge associated with the rational faculty of the soul, he must possess religious knowledge which he receives through divine revelations (*Wahy*) associated with the imaginative faculty of the soul. As I and Qin have discussed elsewhere, by making revelations, in addition to reason, the source of his ruler's superior knowledge, Alfarabi "associates him with the prophet of Islam, Muhammad, rightly guided Sunni caliphs and Shia Imams who received guidance from God through revelation" (Ali and Qin 2019). However, the question that is of paramount significance here is why does the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city need religion in addition to philosophy? In other words, when the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city knows the things as they are, why does he need to know the symbolic imitation of the things as they are? When he possesses the superior philosophical knowledge, the truth, why does he need to possess the inferior religious knowledge, a mere symbolic imitation of the truth?[5]

To answer the above questions, first of all we need to know some of the important functions of the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city. Alfarabi (1985, pp. 235–47) tells us that the ruler of his virtuous city is the one who organizes the virtuous city and arranges its people "in the ranks which are proper to them". He is the one who is responsible for removing any "disorder" found in the people of the virtuous city. Because he is the one who knows the true felicity, the ultimate goal of the virtuous city, and the actions by which this true felicity can be attained, he should "lead people well along the right path to felicity and to the actions by which felicity is reached". He should make the true felicity the goal of the people of the virtuous city and should establish the voluntary actions in them by which the true felicity can be attained. Lastly, he should make the people of the virtuous city take him as "their guide", "follow" him, and "imitate" his aim in their actions. These are the crucial functions of the ruler on which the whole political system of Alfarabi, the virtuous city, stands. Now, the question here is how will he carry out these functions? It is clear that the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city can carry out these functions only if the people of the virtuous city submit to his commands unconditionally and unquestioningly. Thus, perhaps the first and the most important task of the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city is to achieve a complete, unconditional, and unquestioning submission of the people of the virtuous city to his commands. For a complete, unconditional, and unquestioning submission of the people of the virtuous city to the commands of their ruler, it is essential that the people are convinced that their ruler is legitimate and infallible. In this context, another important question is how can the people of Alfarabi's virtuous city be convinced that their ruler is legitimate and infallible? To answer this question, first we need to know the people who constitute the population of Alfarabi's virtuous city.

In his *Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fādila*, Alfarabi (1985, p. 233) provides some information about the composition of his virtuous city. He tells us that his virtuous city consists of people who are divided into various ranks in the form of a hierarchy. This hierarchical rank ordering is based on the difference in the "natural disposition" of the people. The first and topmost rank in this hierarchy consists of the ruler and those who are close to the ruler. Those who are close to the ruler perform their actions "in conformity with the intention of the ruler". The second rank of the hierarchy consists of those people "who perform their actions in accordance with the aims" of the people who are close to the ruler. The people of the second rank are followed by the people of the third rank "who

perform their actions according to the aims of the people" of the second rank. The rank ordering of the people of the virtuous continues in this manner until the last and lowest rank of the city which consists of those people who "perform their actions according to the aims of others, while there do not exist any people who perform their actions according to their aims". This description of the composition of Alfarabi's virtuous city in *Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fādila* does not give us information about the total number of ranks in the virtuous city and the exact identity of the people of each rank. Fortunately, this information is provided in Alfarabi's *Fuṣūl al-madanī* (Aphorisms of the Statesman). In his *Fuṣūl al-madanī*, Alfarabi (1952, p. 113) tells us that his virtuous city consists of five ranks. The first rank includes those who are "wise", "intelligent" and "prudent in great matters". The second rank consists of the "orators, the eloquent, the poets, the musicians, the secretaries and the like". The third rank consists of "the accountants, the geometers, the doctors, the astrologers and the like". The fourth rank is composed of "the army, the guards and the like". Finally, the fifth rank includes those people "who gain wealth in the city, such as farmers, herdsmen, merchants and the like".

If we combine the above-mentioned two descriptions of the composition of Alfarabi's virtuous city, it can be said that the first rank of the virtuous city consists of the ruler and those who are close to the ruler and that they are wise, intelligent, and prudent in great matters. It is safe to say that the first rank of the virtuous city represents the ruling class of the city. The people of the first rank are those who can access knowledge of things as they are, the philosophical knowledge. The ruler of the virtuous city, a philosopher, is the most perfect among the members of the first rank of the virtuous city. He possesses the most perfect and superior knowledge, the knowledge of things as they are, the truth, through strict demonstrations and his own insight. As I mentioned in Section 2, the people who are close to the philosopher access the truth through the insight of the philosopher by trusting him, following him, and assenting to his views. The members of the first rank of the virtuous city who are close to the philosopher-ruler are convinced about the legitimacy of the ruler because they know that he is the best and most perfect among the citizens of the virtuous city since he possesses the most superior and perfect knowledge, philosophical knowledge. They are convinced about the infallibility of the ruler because they know that his decisions and actions are based on pure reason and knowledge of the truth. They are convinced that he is the one who can lead them to the felicity since he knows the true felicity and the path that leads to true felicity. Thus, they follow him and submit to his commands completely, unconditionally and unquestioningly.

The philosophical knowledge of the ruler is sufficient to convince those who are close to the ruler about his legitimacy and infallibility. Thereby, they follow the intentions of the ruler in their actions. However, the first rank of the virtuous city represents a very small portion of the population of the virtuous city. The other four ranks of the virtuous city represent the majority of the population of the virtuous city, the masses. Because the people of these four ranks are neither philosophers nor close to the philosophers and lack the intellectual capacity to know things as they are, the philosophical knowledge of the ruler cannot convince them about the legitimacy and infallibility of the ruler. And because they cannot fathom the superiority of the philosophical knowledge of the ruler, it is unlikely that they will follow the intentions of the ruler in their actions because of the philosophical knowledge of the ruler. To convince them about the legitimacy and infallibility of the ruler, the ruler must be superior in the knowledge which they can understand. As I mentioned in Section 2, those who are not philosophers or close to philosophers can know the symbolic imitation of philosophy, religion. Thus, the ruler of the virtuous city needs religion to convince them about his legitimacy and infallibility. The majority of the people of the virtuous city who are neither philosophers nor close to the philosophers are convinced about the legitimacy of the ruler because they believe that he is chosen by God since he is the one who receives guidance from God in the form of revelations. They are convinced about the infallibility of the ruler because they believe that his words and actions are guided by God. Since God is infallible, he is infallible too. They are convinced that he knows

felicity and the path to felicity because they believe that God has given him this knowledge through revelations. They follow his aims and intentions in their actions and submit to his commands completely, unconditionally, and unquestioningly because they believe that his aims, intentions, and commands are, in fact, the aims, intentions, and commands of God which are provided to him through revelations.

5. Conclusions

Alfarabi's understanding of philosophy and religion is grounded in the distinction between the knowledge of things as they truly are and their symbolic representation. According to him, philosophy represents the ultimate truth and can only be grasped through rigorous demonstrations and insight. Those who possess superior minds, namely philosophers and those close to them, have the capacity to attain this knowledge directly. On the other hand, religion serves as the symbolic representation of philosophy, allowing individuals who lack philosophical capacity to access the truth through imitative symbols.

There is no doubt that, for Alfarabi, religion is an inferior form of knowledge as compared to philosophy. However, in the absence of either philosophy or religion, the political system proposed by Alfarabi can neither exist nor function properly. The virtuous city of Alfarabi consists of the philosophers or those who are close to the philosophers and the non-philosophers. The ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city uses his superior philosophical knowledge to rule the philosophers and those who are close to the philosophers. However, the philosophers and those who are close to the philosophers represent a very small portion of the population of the virtuous city. For the existence and smooth functioning of Alfarabi's virtuous city, it is necessary that the non-philosophers also believe in the legitimacy and infallibility of the ruler and submit to his commands unconditionally. Because the non-philosophers lack the intellectual capacity to access philosophical knowledge the superior philosophical knowledge of the ruler cannot convince the non-philosophers about the legitimacy and infallibility of the ruler. They would neither accept his rule nor submit to his commands because of his philosophical knowledge. Therefore, the ruler of Alfarabi's virtuous city utilizes religion, the knowledge which the inferior minds of the non-philosophers can access, to convince the non-philosophers about his legitimacy and infallibility, to submit them to his commands, and to rule them. Thus, philosophy and religion are equally significant for the existence and proper functioning of the political system proposed by Alfarabi.

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Notes

1 For a detailed discussion on Averroes versus Al-Ghazali polemic, see Montada (1992).

2 Traditionally, the Neoplatonists are known for their lack of interest in political philosophy. Therefore, the co-existence of politics and Neoplatonism in Alfarabi is often denied. The scholars who provide the Neoplatonic reading of Alfarabi tend to deny the status of Alfarabi as a political philosopher. On the other hand, the scholars who consider Alfarabi a political philosopher tend to refute the Neoplatonic reading of Alfarabi. Elsewhere, I have refuted the arguments against the co-existence of politics and Neoplatonic metaphysics in Alfarabi, and have concluded that Alfarabi is indeed a Neoplatonist as well as a political philosopher. For details, see Ali (2022b).

[3] In his *Enumeration of the Sciences*, Alfarabi distinguishes between true felicity and presumed felicity. He argues that some mistakenly presume that things such as wealth, honor, and pleasure are felicity. This is presumed felicity, which is completely different from real and true felicity. For details, see Alfarabi (2004).

[4] For a detailed discussion on Alfarabi's theory of emanation, see Ali (2022b).

[5] Leo Strauss (1945, 1989) and his followers, such as Butterworth (1972), argue that the environment in which the Muslim Arab philosophers, such as Alfarabi, worked was hostile and that these philosophers were compelled to align their views with Islamic religious beliefs to avoid persecution. Therefore, the Straussian scholars may answer this question by telling us that by making revelation or religion, in addition to philosophy, an important source of the knowledge of his ruler, Alfarabi is trying to align his views with Islamic religious beliefs so that he can avoid persecution. However, elsewhere I have refuted the Straussian view and shown that this view is based on unsound grounds. For a detailed discussion on the Straussian view and my refutation of the Straussian view, see Ali (2022a, 2022b).

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Blind Man, Mirror, and Fire: Aquinas, Avicenna, and Averroes on Thinking

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Abstract: In Islamic tradition, the *Falsafa* school is well known for its naturalistic account of religion. When *Falsafa*'s theory of religion made its way to the Latin West, it was embraced and developed into the so-called "double truth theory" in Latin Averroism. However, this theory quickly lost its influence in the Latin tradition, primarily due to the critique by Thomas Aquinas. One of the key aspects of Aquinas's critique is his criticism of the emanation theory of concepts and the doctrine of the unity of the intellect, which in turn undermines the foundation of *Falsafa*'s theory of religion, particularly their theory of natural prophecy. This paper aims to revisit the debate between Aquinas and *Falsafa* regarding the theory of intellect as the basis for natural prophecy, with a focus on highlighting *Falsafa*'s perspective. In particular, I examine how Aquinas's arguments overlook the key insights that underpin *Falsafa*'s doctrine of the intellect.

Keywords: Aquinas; Avicenna; Averroes; emanation; the unity of intellect

1. Introduction

In Islamic tradition, the *Falsafa* school is well known for its naturalistic account of the nature of religion.[1] According to this theory, religion is a system of opinions and behaviours established by the first legislator in a community. A religion is considered complete only when its legislator is a true prophet. But what defines a true prophet? According to *Falsafa*, a true prophet has a dual role: they can grasp the truth of the entire reality and establish the truth as a system of opinions and behaviours at the community level in a poetic way. In what sense is a legislator with this dual role considered a prophet? This is where *Falsafa*'s theory of natural prophecy comes into play.

Falsafa's account of natural prophecy aims to provide a naturalistic explanation for the phenomenon of prophets in light of a specific theory of intellect. The general strategy can be outlined as follows: human intellectual cognition involves receiving intelligible forms from the agent intellect that exists independently in the celestial world and is often referred to as the giver of forms. It explains both the substantial changes in the sublunar world and how the human intellect acquires intelligible forms. Based on this theory of intellect, prophetic revelation is considered a limiting situation where the human intellect receives intelligible forms from the agent intellect. In this situation, certain gifted individuals can receive knowledge about the order of the entire reality from the agent intellect in a very short period of time and express this knowledge in their imagination.[2]

Within *Falsafa*, there are different views on how the human intellect receives intelligible forms from the agent intellect. Al-Fārābī and Avicenna believe that every individual has the ability to receive these forms. This ability is called the material intellect. They developed the emanation theory of concepts to explain how the material intellect acquires concepts, suggesting that our concepts of external objects emanate from a separate agent intellect.[3] In contrast to the views of Al-Fārābī and Avicenna, who believe that every human being has their own material intellect, Averroes argues that the material intellect is not possessed by individuals but is a distinct entity shared by all humans. This position is called the doctrine of the unity of the intellect.[4] Both the emanation theory of concepts and the doctrine of

the unity of the intellect play foundational roles in *Falsafa*'s theory of religion, as the two different doctrines of intellect form the basis for the theory of natural prophecy. When *Falsafa*'s theory of religion entered the Latin West, it was accepted and developed into the "double truth theory" in Latin Averroism.[5] However, this theory quickly lost its influence in the Latin tradition, primarily due to the critique by Thomas Aquinas. One of the key aspects of Aquinas's critique is his criticism of the emanation theory of concepts and the doctrine of the unity of the intellect, which in turn undermines the foundation of *Falsafa*'s theory of religion, particularly its theory of natural prophecy.[6]

This paper aims to revisit the debate between Aquinas and *Falsafa* regarding the theory of intellect as the foundation for natural prophecy by defending *Falsafa*'s perspective. In particular, I examine how Aquinas's arguments miss the key insights that underpin *Falsafa*'s doctrine of the intellect.

I begin by presenting two arguments (the blind man and the mirror arguments) in Aquinas's critique to outline his general argumentative strategy against *Falsafa*. I focus on how Aquinas reads *Falsafa*, particularly how his reading motivates his criticism. I then turn to *Falsafa's* perspectives, first examining why Avicenna's emanation theory of concepts is immune to the blind man argument and then considering how Averroes's insight that there is an essential difference between thought and natural species motivates the unity of intellect. Following Avicenna, Averroes holds that, at the metaphysical level, different thoughts have a built-in shared content but that different individuals have no built-in shared content. Therefore, for Averroes, thought is not a natural species, and there is no problem with how a thought can be individualised as an instance under a natural species. He proposes the unity of intellect precisely to explain this peculiarity of thought.

If we place Avicenna and Averroes's thought together, we find a picture that is different from Aquinas' conception of thought. For Aquinas, thought is a property that can be attributed to an individual in the world. But for *Falsafa*, thought is metaphysically identical to the act of thinking and is not a categorical property of things in the world. Thought exists outside the world, as a mode of existence different from that of things in the external world. Especially for Averroes, the "I think" is not a state in which one owns their act of thinking but is an event in which the universal intellect thinks through me. I conclude with a remark on the wider cultural context of Islamic intellectual traditions, which may have fostered Averroes's seemingly counterintuitive theory of intellect.

2. Aquinas's Critique of *Falsafa*

Aquinas (2002) dealt with the theory of intellectual cognition in his *Summa Theologiae*, Part I, questions 84–89; he focuses on the intellectual cognition of material things (84–86), of oneself (87), of things higher than the rational soul (88), and of the separate soul (89).[7] In question 84, Aquinas establishes the position that the intellect apprehends material things through the intelligible species.[8] He then questions how the intellect acquires the intelligible species and proposes a criticism of the Platonic–Avicennian approach: the intelligible species come from separate forms or substances.[9] Plato's theory of forms represents the position of coming from separate forms, while Avicenna's position represents coming from separate substances.

Text 1:

> But it is contrary to the nature (*rationem*) of sensible things for their forms to subsist without their matters, as Aristotle proves in a number of ways. Accordingly, Avicenna, after ruling out this view, posited not that the intelligible species of all sensible things subsist on their own without matter, but that they preexist immaterially in separated intellects. Such species are derived from the first of these separated intellects into the next one, and so on down to the final separated intellect, which he named the Agent Intellect. From this intellect, as he says, intelligible species emanate into our souls, and sensible forms into corporeal matter.[10] (*ST*, I, q.84, a.4 (144))

This text clearly shows that Aquinas reads Avicenna's theory of concept formation as the process through which the intelligible species emanate from the agent intellect. He also provides a concise theoretical reconstruction of Avicenna's emanationist theory of conception.[11] According to Aquinas, on the one hand, Avicenna agrees with Plato that the intelligible species must be acquired from forms external to the rational soul. But, on the other hand, Avicenna also accepts Aristotle's powerful critique of Plato's theory of forms, not believing that forms have an independent existence. To solve the difficulties surrounding the independent existence of forms, Avicenna proposes that forms essentially exist in the intellect. Thus, he replaces Platonic forms with forms in the intellect, which is a metaphysical revision that leads to his emanationist understanding of concept formation. The reconstruction of the Plato–Avicenna approach further paves the way for Aquinas's general critique of this approach because Plato's and Avicenna's theories cannot explain why the cognitive nature of human intellect must depend on the body. Moreover, Aquinas raises a possible reply from the Avicennian perspective that emphasises the fact that Avicenna distributes a role to the senses in the process of intellectual cognition:

Text 2:

> It might be said, however, in line with Avicenna, that the senses are necessary to the soul because they arouse it to turn toward the Agent Intelligence, from which it receives species. But this is not adequate. For if it belongs to the soul's nature to understand through species emanating from the Agent Intelligence, then it would follow that the soul could sometimes turn toward the Agent Intelligence out of the inclination of its own nature, or even that, aroused by one sense, It turns toward the Agent Intelligence to receive the species of sensibles belonging to a sense that the person does not have. In this way, someone born blind could have knowledge of colours, which is clearly false. Accordingly, it must be said that the intelligible species by which our soul understands do not emanate from separate forms.[12] (*ST*, I, q.84, a.4 (145–6))

Aquinas notes that the senses play an important role in Avicenna's doctrine of concept acquisition because Avicenna believes that grasping the intelligible requires the assistance of the senses, as sensory images can trigger the process of emanation.[13] However, Aquinas points out a crucial difference between emanation and the role of the senses in Avicenna's view: Emanation is a defining factor of intellectual cognition in human beings because it "belongs to the soul's nature", whereas the senses, as an occasional trigger, are not used to define human intellectual cognition.[14] Therefore, for Avicenna, the definition of the rational soul does not rule out the conceivability of grasping the intelligible form from the agent intellect, even without a sensory occasion to trigger its emanation. In other words, for Avicenna, it seems possible to acquire the intelligible without the help of the senses. This possibility is a theoretical consequence that Aquinas considers counter-intuitive because, if it were possible, "someone born blind could have knowledge of colours, which is clearly false".

Let us now turn to the mirror argument, which Aquinas presents in his well-known treatise *De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas* as part of his systematic criticism of the unity of intellect:[15]

Text 3:

> He said that the understanding of that separate substance is my understanding or that person's understanding, in so far as that possible intellect is joined to me or to you through phantasms which are in me and in you. He said that this is accomplished in the following way. Now the intelligible species, which becomes one with the possible intellect since it is its form and act, has two subjects: one, the phantasms themselves; the other, the possible intellect. So therefore the possible intellect is in contact with us through its form by means of the phantasms; and thus, as long as the possible intellect understands, this man understands.[16] (*DUI*, c. 3, par. 63 (49))

In this passage, Aquinas reconstructs Averroes's so-called two-subject theory. Generally speaking, for Averroes, concept acquisition happens in the following way: first, the images acquired through the external senses need to be properly prepared by the cogitative power, and then the agent intellect sheds light on the images (as is the case in Avicenna's theory), which finally triggers the process of abstraction in the potential intellect, although for Averroes the potential intellect is not in us but is separate and shared by all human beings. In this picture, the potential intellect is the bearer of the intelligibles, and the cogitative power is the so-called *subject of truth* insofar as the correspondence relation occurs between the intelligibles in the intellect and images in the cogitative power.[17] According to Aquinas, Averroes posits the two-subject theory to *save the phenomenon* because Averroes believes that the thought of the potential intellect can somehow be attributed to the cogitative power insofar as the cogitative power triggers the potential intellect and serves as its subject of truth.

In DUI, Aquinas highlights two different aspects of UI as the targets of his criticisms: the two-subject theory and the thesis that the cogitative power triggers the actuality of the potential intellect. To criticise the two-subject theory, Aquinas presents three distinct arguments (the argument from the essential unity between soul and body, the mirror argument, and the colour-wall argument). In what follows, I will only focus on the mirror argument. This is not because it is the most powerful or cogent criticism, but because it is a relatively vivid one that clearly shows Aquinas's general concern about UI and how his main argumentative strategy centres on the belief that human beings can think and own their own thoughts:[18]

Text 4:

> Unless perhaps it be said that the possible intellect is in contact with phantasms as a mirror is in contact with the man whose appearance is reflected in the mirror. But such a contact clearly does not suffice for the contact of the act. For it is clear that the action of the mirror, which is to represent, cannot on this account be attributed to the man. Whence neither can the action of the possible intellect be attributed, on account of the above-mentioned joining, to this man who is Socrates, in such a way that this man would understand.[19] (*DUI*, c. 3, par. 65 (50))

The mirror is like the potential intellect; the man facing the mirror is like the cogitative power. The proper condition between the mirror and man, which enables the image of the man to occur in the mirror, is like the light from the agent intellect. The image of the man that occurs in the mirror is like the intelligible. Given that, in the case of the mirror, the images in the mirror are not attributed to the man but to the mirror; likewise, in Averroes's account of intellectual cognition, the intelligible should be attributed to the potential intellect and not to the cogitative power.[20] Clearly, in the mirror case, the image in the mirror is possessed by the mirror and not by the man. Likewise, Averroes's unity of intellect implies that the real possessor of the intelligibles is the potential intellect and not the cogitative power. Therefore, thoughts cannot be attributed to us in the sense that we own our thoughts; for Aquinas, this result is counterintuitive.

3. Abstractionism versus Emanationism

Although Aquinas considers Avicenna's theory of concept acquisition to be emanationist, once we turn to Avicenna's own writings, Aquinas's reading is doubtful. Over the last two decades, scholars have debated whether Avicenna is an emanationist or an abstractionist with regard to concept acquisition. This debate arises from Avicenna's seemly different answers about how concepts are acquired. For example, in *al-Nafs*, we have the following:[21]

Text 5:

> As for the intellectual faculty (*al-quwwa al-ʿaqliyya*), when it reviews (*aṭlaʿat*) the particulars that are in the imagination, and the light of the active intellect (we discussed) sheds light upon [the particulars] in us, [the particulars] are transformed

(*istaḥālat*) to [things] abstract (*mujarrada*) from matter and its accidents and are impressed upon the rational soul. (*al-Nafs*, 235 lines 2–5)

In this text, Avicenna takes concept acquisition to be a process of preparation and reception in which the rational soul prepares images into a proper state, which allows them to be exposed to the illumination of the agent intellect. This process triggers the corresponding concepts to emanate in the intellect. However, in other texts, the role of the agent intellect seems completely absent:

Text 6:

So [the intellect] turns to these accidents, then extracts them (*yanziʿu*), as though it were (*yakūnu kaʾannahu*) peeling away (*yuqashshiru*) those accidents from it and throwing them away to one side until it arrives at the meaning (*al- maʿnā*) in which they participate and by which they do not differ; and then [the intellect] acquires (*yuḥaṣṣilu*) it and conceptualises (*yataṣawwaru*) it. From the first moment that [the intellect] inspects the mix in the imagination, it finds (*yajidu*) accidents and essential components, and of the accidents, [it finds] those that are necessary and those that are not. It separates (*yufridu*) the meanings from the mixed multiplicity in the imagination and takes its essence from [the mixed multiplicity]. (*al-Burhān*, 222 lines 8–11)

In this text, Avicenna vividly describes the process of concept acquisition as the extraction of abstract concepts (the intelligible form) from sensible images. Abstraction is depicted as an activity of peeling, as if images have a conceptual core wrapped in various sensible accidents that can be extracted by peeling off the sensible accidents. It is worth noting that Avicenna does not mention the role of the agent intellect. This omission might leave readers with the impression that the human intellect can abstract concepts from images on its own.

Scholars have developed various versions of abstractionism and emanationism to interpret textual complexities.[22] According to the standard emanationist view, one acquires the concept of whiteness through the following mechanism: first, one receives the image of white through the external senses, and after complex processing by the internal senses, an event of emanation from the agent intellect is triggered through which the concept of white appears in one's intellect (Black 2005, pp. 308–26; Davidson 1992, pp. 92–4; Lizzini 2010, pp. 223–42; Rahman 1958, p. 15; Taylor 2005, p. 180).

Note the explanatory relation between image preparation and emanation. Strictly speaking, preparation is sufficient but not necessary for emanation because Avicenna does not believe that it is always necessary to rely on the preparation of an image through the imagination every time a person thinks of a particular concept. Instead, relying on preparation usually happens only when one acquires the concept. When one's intellect is powerful enough, the intellect can dispense with the help of imagination and directly trigger an event of emanation on its own (*al-Nafs*, 50, line 1).

On the contrary, according to the standard abstraction theory, after white images are prepared by the internal sensory system, the intellect then extracts the concept of white through its power of abstraction. The agent intellect still plays a specific explanatory role in this process: its illumination provides an environmental condition that enables the power of abstracting to function (Hasse 2001, pp. 39–72). Clearly, the most important difference between the theories of abstraction and emanation is that each provides a different explanation for the source of concepts. Another notable difference is that each also points to a deeper debate in light of the problem of concept acquisition: whether Avicenna is an empiricist or a rationalist.

In general, abstractionists tend to consider Avicenna an empiricist, while emanationists typically associate him with rationalism.[23] One way to distinguish between the two is to examine whether Avicenna considers images essential for concept acquisition. From an empiricist perspective, concept acquisition and sensory experience have an intimate relationship. If we consider experience as the source of concepts, then the process of concept

acquisition cannot be understood without recourse to sensory experience. However, from the perspective of rationalism, Avicenna is not committed to such a strong relation between experience and concept acquisition. For example, one's experience of F-things may help one acquire the F-concept, but this does not mean that concept acquisition without experience cannot be understood, as some concepts may originate from the intellect itself and not from experience. Having made these distinctions, I will argue that, regardless of whether Avicenna is an abstractionist/empiricist or an emanationist/rationalist, he has a reply to Aquinas's blind man argument.

4. Does Avicenna Fall Prey to the Blind Man Argument?

According to Aquinas' blind man argument, if the emanationist's account of the intelligible form is correct, then a man born blind can have knowledge of colour. However, it is clear that a man born blind cannot have knowledge of colour. Therefore, the emanationist's account is false. From the perspective of the abstractionist's interpretation, Avicenna may have a quick reply to the blind man argument: the argument is both right and wrong. It is right because the abstractionist can accept that the argument has proven how the emanationist's account of concept acquisition is problematic. But it is wrong as a critique of Avicenna because Avicenna is not an emanationist. Aquinas's mistake is that he did not correctly grasp Avicenna's theory. Avicenna and Aquinas, in the eyes of the abstractionist, have no substantial theoretical differences with regard to the problem of concept acquisition. Therefore, the theoretical burden of responding to BMA mainly falls on the emanationist.

The real theoretical issue here is as follows: does emanationism inevitably fall prey to the blind man argument? A possible response from an emanationist could begin with questioning the apparent intuition that it is inconceivable for a blind man to know what colour is. The meaning behind this intuition seems unclear because the concept—*knowing what colour is*—is ambiguous. One might offer at least three different interpretations of the intuition, each based on a different understanding of what it means to know what colour is.

> I1: The essence of colour is nothing but the phenomenal colour that one directly experiences in one's colour-experiences, so the real knowing of the what-ness of a colour is not a dry conceptual belief that one can hold based on one's colour-concepts. Instead, the direct colour-experience brings one to the thing-itself—to literally see the colour itself.
>
> I2: The essence of colour is what the intellect grasps by the concept of colour, so it is intellectual and not the qualia that one experiences. Therefore, having the conception of the essence of colour is sufficient for the knowledge of what colour is.
>
> I3: The intellect grasps the essence of colour through the concept of colour but to have a real understanding of what a colour is, one needs to properly form an explanatory connection between one's concepts and the relevant experiences.

I1 is the belief that the true cognition of colour only occurs through colour experience. Conversely, I2 and I3 involve the belief that grasping the essence of colour belongs to the intellect. The difference between I2 and I3 is that the former involves the belief that a conceptual grasp of colour through the intellect amounts to knowledge of what colour is, while the latter involves real conceptual knowledge of the essence of colours, which requires one to know how to apply concepts to explain their perception of colours.

If we unpack the apparent intuition that someone born blind cannot have the knowledge of colour from the perspective of I1 or I3, emanationists would not deny that a blind person cannot know what colour is. To clarify this point, we need to understand Avicenna's theory of sensation and perception. Avicenna refers to the sensible forms received by the external senses as *the near sensible* and the objects represented by these sensible forms as *the far sensible* (*al-Nafs*, 66, lines 6–14). The soul, through the external senses, can only feel the near sensible forms and cannot know whether they represent external objects

(*al-Nafs*, 62, lines 5–9). To perceive external objects, cooperation among different faculties is required: first, various forms perceived by the external senses must be unified in the common sense, and then the estimative power or intellect is required to determine these forms as possessing external existence. In short, we can distinguish between sensation and perception in Avicenna's theory of the external and internal senses, with the former being acquaintance without intentionality and the latter being cognition with intentionality.[24]

In this framework, a blind person lacks both the sensation and perception of colour: even if one can independently acquire the concept of a colour without one's sensory system, one cannot identify the perceptual objects that can be explained by the colour concept. Therefore, neither I1 nor I3 can establish knowledge of colour. Thus, Avicenna does not deny that a blind person does not know colour given either interpretation of the intuition.

The controversy lies in I2. Emanationists accept that I2 is a real possibility for a blind person. The question then is whether the blind man can have knowledge of colour in the sense that he can have colour concepts. It is not clear whether this belief is self-evident. It is also possible that people do not share a self-evident intuition concerning the case of the blind man, just as people may not have a self-evident intuition about the necessity of images or imagination for intellectual cognition. In such cases, empiricists might judge that the blind man does not have colour concepts, as this aligns with their position regarding concept formation. However, rationalists might judge the opposite. It is important to note that the belief that people born blind cannot understand colour is not a self-evident thesis in contemporary cognitive science. Instead, it is typically considered an opinion of empiricist philosophers, and several recent studies have challenged this belief.[25] Considering that this seemingly intuitive belief has been critically examined through empirical science, it is difficult to admit that the claim that the blind man cannot have colour concepts is self-evident.

According to Avicenna's emanationist theory, it is possible for a blind person to acquire the concept of colour in the sense of I2 because of his rationalistic stance on the relation between concept acquisition and sensibles: the two are not intimately related. Avicenna can provide independent support for his rationalistic position on the basis of at least three other commitments. First, Avicenna believes that the definition of a conception does not necessarily include reference to the sensibles, which means that a conception is at least open in its essence to whether it depends on the sensibles for acquisition. Second, he believes that it is empirically true that the intellect can operate independently of perceptual systems, which means that an intimate relation between the sensibles and conception does not exist (*al-Nafs*, 221 line 15−223 line 10). Third, the openness of a conception to its relation to the sensibles further guarantees the possibility of the divine intellection of the sensibles. The divine intellect is precisely the kind of intellect whose conception does not depend on sensation or perception.[26]

5. Revisiting the Unity of Intellect

Averroes presents his most detailed discussion of the unity of intellect in his *Long Commentary on the De Anima of Aristotle*, Book 3, Chapter 5, where he considers three different explanations for the ontological status of the material intellect. These include Alexander of Aphrodisias' view that the material intellect is the disposition of the body, Ibn Bājja's view that the material intellect is the disposition in the imaginative power, and Themistius's view that the material intellect is a separate substance. Averroes rejects the first two positions and attempts to work out his own view based on a reworking of Themistius's position. He first raises several problems with Themistius's position, and then reformulates the problem as a concise dilemma. According to Averroes, the key to building a proper view on the material intellect is to resolve a dilemma about the intelligible. If the intelligible is the same in you and me, then it seems that everyone would be thinking at the same time. However, if the intelligible in you and the intelligible in me are individualised, then it seems that intellectual cognition and teaching would be impossible. Towards the end of Chapter 5, Averroes provides his ultimate answer to this dilemma.[27]

Text 7:

(7A) For if the thing understood in me and in you were one in every way, it would happen that when I would know some intelligible, you would also know it, and many other impossible things [would also follow]. If we assert it to be many, then it would happen that the thing understood in me and in you would be one in species and two in individual [number]. In this way the thing understood will have a thing understood and so it proceeds into infinity.

(7B) Thus, it will be impossible for a student to learn from a teacher unless the knowledge which is in the teacher is a power generating and creating knowledge which is in the student, in the way in which one fire generates another fire similar to it in species, which is impossible. That what is known is the same in the teacher and the student in this way caused Plato to believe that learning is recollection.

(7C) Since, then, we asserted that the intelligible thing which is in me and in you is many in subject insofar as it is true, namely, the forms of imagination, and one in the subject in virtue of which it is an existing intellect (namely, the material [intellect]), those questions are completely resolved.[28] (*LCDA*, 411.710–412.728)

First, Averroes restates the dilemma in Text 7A, without discussing the first horn in detail because he explained it earlier. He quickly moves to the second horn and presents two short arguments to explain why the individualisation of the intelligible is problematic. The first argument suggests that the individualised intelligible leads to an infinite regress of the intelligible.[29] The traditional interpretation proposes that the infinite regress arises from the fact that the individualised intelligible, strictly speaking, is not truly the intelligible (because the true intelligible should be in some way common to you and me). Therefore, it triggers a further effort to acquire the real intelligible, which, in turn, leads to an individualised intelligible and so on to an infinite regress (Averroes 2011, pp. 328–9, note 114; Taylor 2004, pp. 125–6). Stephen Ogden has recently argued that the infinite regress, as understood by the traditional interpretation, is merely a potential regress (Ogden 2021, pp. 441–5).[30]

However, in my view, the traditional interpretation does not involve a potential regress. The target of the first horn is that the intelligible form in you and in me is one *in every way*. However, in the second horn, the intelligible is still in you and in me but *not one in every way*. Rather, it is in the way that our intellectual cognition aims to grasp something common to you and me, but to explain why people have different thoughts, the common object is then taken as an individualised form in a given subject. If this is the case, then the problem is as follows: how could an individualised object become something common? In order to grasp the common object, one's intellect still needs to grasp a common intelligible that begins with the individual intelligible. However, the intellect's effort will still end up grasping an individualised intelligible, which further requires a move towards commonality, which leads to an infinite regress.

In other words, in the second horn, the infinite regress is caused by an irreducible gap between the end of the act of conception (grasping the common intelligible) and the actual but unacceptable result of that act (the individualised intelligible). The regress is not potential because our intellect must constantly and actually strive to move from the individual intelligible to the common intelligible, given that the end of the act of conception is to grasp the common intelligible. If grasping the intelligible amounts to an infinite process of grasping the individualised intelligible, then it means that the end of the act of conception has never been realised; that is, there has never been any conception. However, since we do have real conceptions, there is no actual infinite process of striving to achieve conception.

After Averroes's infinite regress argument, he criticises the individualisation of the intelligible form from another perspective, which centres on the possibility of teaching. If the individualisation of the intelligible form were possible, it would lead to an unacceptable consequence: the activity of teaching would be impossible. From the perspective of the impossibility of teaching, the discussion of individualisation of the intelligible form contains

a new argument, one different from the argument of infinite regress. Let us call it the impossibility argument of knowledge transmission.

Averroes introduced a concise analogy to illustrate the impossibility argument of knowledge transmission. Consider how fire causes something to burn. When an object comes near a fire, it can become hot and eventually be consumed by the flames. In this case, the fire can cause the object to receive its own form. Now consider the process of knowledge transmission, for example, when a teacher, who knows the definition of a circle, imparts it to a student. In this case, the teacher first possesses some intelligible form, and through their teaching, they cause in some way a new concept of a circle in the student's mind.

The question that Averroes has us consider is whether the transmission of knowledge and the transmission of the form of fire follow the same pattern. His answer is negative. In the case of fire, the burning heat in the fire and the burning heat produced in the object do not share a common content. But in the process of knowledge transmission, the intelligible form that the teacher possesses and the intelligible form that the student acquires essentially share a common content. When a student acquires the concept of a circle under the teacher's instruction, what the student grasps is precisely what the teacher grasps. Therefore, we cannot confuse an intelligible form with things like fire. Were one to confuse the intelligible form with, say, fire, the intelligible form would lose the ability of sharing the same content with other intelligible forms. However, this ability is precisely the prerequisite for imparting knowledge. Based on this insight, we can reconstruct Averroes' argument as follows:

The impossibility argument of knowledge transmission

P1: If the intelligible form can be individualized, then the intelligible form must become a member of a species of natural things.

P2: If the intelligible form is a member of a species of natural things, then different intelligible forms cannot share the same content.

P3: If different intelligible forms cannot share the same content, then teaching is impossible.

P4: Teaching is possible.

C1: Different intelligible forms can share the same content.

C2: The intelligible form is not a member of a species of natural things.

C3: The intelligible form cannot be individualized.

Averroes explains P1 at the beginning of Text 7: If we believe that an intelligible form can be attributed to an individual, then an individual can possess an individual intelligible form just as they possess an individual colour or quantity. Furthermore, we can take the intelligible form itself as a species under which there are many individualised intelligible forms that constitute the members of the species. P3 is evident given Averroes's illustration of the activity of teaching. P4 can be understood as a premise established on the basis of experience. It seems that the most problematic premise is P2, as it is unclear why being members of a species of natural things amounts to the rejection of sharing the same content. For example, there are different pictures of Averroes. Some might be made of paper, while others might be digital. However, all these pictures are made of some kind of physical natural thing. Clearly, all these pictures share a content, which is that they all represent Averroes. But it is hard to deny that these pictures are natural things. Therefore, P3 is not only unclear but also seems easily falsified.

Averroes is not concerned with any possible form of representation but rather with the feature of the intelligible form conceived of as sharing the same content. In other words, the key to understanding P2 lies in how Averroes understands how different intelligible forms might share the same content. Although Averroes disagrees with Avicenna on many issues, he does follow Avicenna in understanding the intelligible form as the conception of quiddity.[31] Therefore, it may be helpful to return to Avicenna's metaphysical analysis of

the intelligible form. Avicenna is well known for initiating a trend in Arabic philosophy that analyses the intelligible form as the occurrence of quiddity in the mind.

Text 8:

> The one form in the intellect is related to the many, and it is on this consideration (*al-iʿtibār*) a universal, it is one meaning in the intellect, whose relation to any given animal does not differ; that is, the form of any of them is present to the imagination immediately; the intellect then extracts its meaning (*maʿnāhu*) abstracted from accidents, [then] the form itself occurs (*ḥaṣala*) in the intellect. This form is the one which occurs by abstracting animality from any individual image, taken either from an external existent or from something that plays the role of an external existent even if it itself does not exist externally but [is something] the imagination invents. (*al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 156, lines 10–18)

In my view, Aquinas rightly points out that Avicenna's understanding of the ontological status of intelligible forms is a correction of the theory of Platonic forms. From Avicenna's perspective, to explain why different people in different places at different times can provide the same answer for what a thing is or, to put it more technically, conceive the same quiddity, Plato believes that the quiddity of things is a kind of entity that can be separated from the human intellect and subsist on its own. But this position leads to many absurdities. To solve these problems, Avicenna proposes that quiddity itself is not an independent entity but either exists in things or in the mind. However, as far as its existence in things is concerned, quiddity is individualised, and only when it exists in the mind can it maintain its sameness in different conceptions.[32] We might find a clue in Avicenna's doctrine of the triple distinction of quiddity for understanding why sharing the same content is a feature that cannot be instantiated by individualised things in the world.

Strictly speaking, according to Avicenna and Averroes, the idea that we share the same content in intelligible forms means that the same essence exists in different intelligible forms as their common content. The intelligible horse in my mind makes horseness available to me. However, this does not mean that the form makes me stand in a cognitive relation to an abstract object outside my mind that exists independently. Rather, horseness is available to me precisely because it exists in my mind: Horseness literally exists in my mind and becomes an aspect of the intelligible form *horse*. This aspect is not individualised in my conception of horse because it is also common to any other possible conception of horse, whether in my mind or in others' minds. In this sense, although horseness as the common content cannot exist independently as a Platonic form, it is still independent in the sense that it has what might be called *inter-intellectual subjectivity*. By this phrase, I mean that the same horseness as the common content, though inseparable from any intellect, always exists and is open to different intellects as an aspect shared by any possible intellect.[33]

In light of the inter-intellectual subjectivity of the quiddity as content, we can draw a sharp distinction between quiddity in the mind and quiddity in things. When horseness is in the external world, it is individualised as different horses. The individualisation of horseness in the external world not only means the rejection of the so-called *universal in things* but, more importantly, also that different individualised horses are not connected through *horseness as a common aspect cognitively open to different horses*. Were one horse in the world to instantiate the inter-intellectual subjectivity, it would not be a horse in the world but a concept. In this sense, the inter-intellectual subjectivity sets a clear boundary between the mind and the external world, which might be Averroes's reason for supporting P2.

One might have a more global concern about the argument as a whole: even if one accepts the soundness of the fire argument, the argument establishes only that the intelligible cannot be individualised. There is still a gap from the non-individualisation of the intelligible form to positing a single intellect for all human beings. What is Averroes's demonstration for his move from the rejection of the individualised thesis to his doctrine of the unity of the intellect?

In my view, there is indeed no demonstration, but to clarify this point, we must return to Averroes's general argumentative strategy for the unity of the intellect. One common misunderstanding of Averroes's strategy is that he accepts that we can rightly attribute thoughts to an individual. Therefore, although he produces a few arguments that step towards the unity of the intellect, he still posits the two-subject theory to save the phenomenon that individuals think. Unfortunately, he is not aware that his attempts are doomed to failure given the large gap between his theory of intellect and our intuition that thoughts which occur in me are naturally mine. However, the infinite regress argument and the fire argument are clearly targeted at the individualisation of the intelligible form, which serves as a precondition of attributing thought to an individual. If Averroes, on the one hand, tries to produce an argument against the attribution of thoughts to the individual, how could he, on the other hand, save the phenomenon? A more plausible proposal might be that Averroes is not interested in *saving the phenomenon*. On the contrary, his aim is to show that the seemingly natural intuition does not hold up to reflection and should be rectified.

The rectification proceeds in three steps. First, he needs to show why the intelligible form cannot be individualised. Second, if the intelligible form cannot be individualised, he needs a theory of intellect that can offer the best explanation for the non-individualisation of the intelligible forms. And, finally, he needs an error theory to explain what the seemingly natural intuition really means. In the three-steps reading, the unity of the intellect is posited for the second step, not through demonstration but through inference from the best explanation. The two-subject theory is for the third step, which does not aim to save the intuition but clarifies the meaning of "an individual thinks" in light of his new theory of intellect that accommodates the non-individualisation of the intelligible forms. For Averroes, "an individual thinks" precisely means that the universal intellect thinks through an individual. Therefore, it is unfair of Aquinas to criticise Averroes by appealing to the intuition that Averroes tries to rectify. By presupposing the intuition as evidently true, Aquinas misses the field of debate.

6. Concluding Remarks

Through a detailed analysis of Avicenna and Averroes on the intellect in the context of Aquinas's critique, I have shown that *Falsafa*'s positions cannot be easily refuted by Aquinas's arguments. However, my aim has not been to defend *Falsafa*'s theory of intellect from Aquinas's critical insight. *Falsafa*'s theories are still problematic in several respects. For example, in my reconstruction of Averroes's argumentative strategy for the unity of intellect, I suggest that the inter-intellectual subjectivity of the intelligible form might serve as Averroes's reason for adopting P2. However, the move from inter-intellectual subjectivity to P2 is not cogent. One way to bridge the gap is to add a hidden or implicit premise that all natural species are in the external world. Given that all natural species are in the external world, the intelligible forms must be in the external world in some sense if they are taken to be natural species. If that is the case, the forms then lose their inter-intellectual subjectivity, and we arrive at P2. However, the belief that all natural species are in the external world is itself problematic and is a view that Avicenna does not seem to adopt.

My defence of *Falsafa*, therefore, is limited to showing the deep theoretical divergences between *Falsafa* and Aquinas, which are likely concealed by their common Aristotelian terminology and their specific arguments and counter-cases. For instance, scholars might assume that philosophers working in the Aristotelian tradition are empiricists about concept formation. However, the deep divergence between Avicenna and Aquinas is precisely about the fundamentally different intuitions of rationalists and empiricists. In the case of Averroes, the divergence seems more counter-intuitive at first glance, given that Aquinas appeals to the idea that we are the primary owners of our thoughts, an intuition that seems to be common sense. In addition to the theoretical analysis of why Averroes thinks this seemingly common sense is problematic, I also hope to add a final remark on a possible

religious condition that might make Averroes's embrace of the attribution of thoughts to the universal intellect seem more understandable.

It is worth starting from the well-known *Hadīth al-Nawāfil*:

Text 9:

> Allāh said "I will declare war against him who shows hostility to a friend of Mine. And the most beloved things with which My servant comes nearer to Me, is what I have enjoined upon him; and My servant keeps on coming closer to Me through performing *nawāfil* (praying or doing extra deeds besides what is obligatory) till I love him, then I become his hearing with which he hears, and his sight with which he sees, and his hand with which he grips, and his leg with which he walks; and if he asks Me, Twill give him, and if he asks My Protection (Refuge), I will protect him (i.e., give him My Refuge); and I do not hesitate to do anything as I hesitate to take the soul of the believer, for he hates death, and I hate to disappoint him." (al-Bukhari 1997, pp. 275–76, revised based on Khan's translation)

Ḥadīth al-Nawāfil is commonly believed to be one of the essential *Ḥadīth* that shapes the Islamic conception of the nearness of Allāh. Especially within the Sufi tradition, the perplexing claim that "I become his hearing with which he hears" is read as an indication of the divine presence, a fundamental doctrine of Sufism, which holds that believers can somehow witness the divine by breaking their own self-centred consciousness.[34] For example, al-Junayd, one of the central figures in the formative period of Sufism, has proposed a clear explanation of how a believer can see or hear through Allāh by being in the state of *fanāʾ* (the breaking or the annihilation of the self):

Text 10:

> They are distinguished by their knowledge of truth before Allāh when Allāh creates in them the faculty of true knowledge of Himself. This faculty emanates from Allāh and must be attributed to Him and *not to the person in whom it is endowed*. The possession of this faculty marks the fullness of endeavours before God. (Kader 2014, p. 162)

In al-Junayd's interpretation of *fanāʾ*, one essential moment is when the individual is aware of the fact that their capacity to know Allah is "from Allah and must be attributed to Him and not to the person in whom it is endowed". To put it simply, for al-Junayd, breaking the self is not a mysteriously conscious state in which one can literally get rid of their first-person perspective; rather, it is a state that might be termed as *the reverse of subject*, in which one is aware of the fact that the operation of their capacity to know is ultimately attributed to the divine principle of the world. Therefore, *the reverse* means that one can break out their everyday belief that their thoughts are primarily their own and arrive at a new state of consciousness in which they know that they are just *a place* through which the divine thinks. Al-Junayd's conception of *fanāʾ* marks out a theme that is repeated again and again in the later development of Sufi traditions and culminates theoretically in Ibn al-ʿArabī's idea of the disclosure of the absolute.[35]

We can see a similarity between Averroes's thoughtful struggle in his theory of intellect and the Sufi view of *fanāʾ*: both try to reach the reverse of the subject. By pointing out this similarity, I do not intend to claim that Averroes is a Sufi or that he is trying to develop an insight from the Sufi tradition with his Aristotelian philosophical resources. Instead, I intend to draw attention to the notable fact that, given that the Sufi movement had a widespread influence throughout the Islamic world during Averroes's time—and that Muslim Spain would later witness Ibn Arabi's age—Averroes was living in a religious world in which our commonplace beliefs about thought attribution would be problematic. This religious condition might be strong evidence for Averroes's doubt about what we take to be intuitive. In other words, one lesson that we can learn from Averroes is that, if we examine the problem of the individualisation of thought from a historically and religiously different perspective, we can understand that the belief that one's thoughts are primarily

attributed to oneself is not always accepted as naturally true and cannot serve as the basis for determining whether a theory of cognition is correct. Therefore, although we may not agree with Averroes's solution and specific argument, we can follow his overall strategy for examining whether seemingly intuitive beliefs have theoretical problems.

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Notes

1 Although *Falsafa* usually refers to philosophers who engage in philosophy in the Islamic intellectual tradition that treats Greek philosophy as paradigmatic (e.g., al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and Averroes), I use the term in this article to refer to Avicenna and Averroes. The naturalistic account of religion refers to the approach taken by the *Falsafa* school, which seeks to explain the nature of religion using the best available theoretical framework of its era while staying within the bounds of rationality.

2 For a general sketch of Al-Fārābī's Theory of Prophecy, see (Walzer 1957).

3 For an overview of Al-Fārābī and Avicenna's theory of intellect, see (Taylor 2006; Gutas 2012b).

4 For an overview of Averroes's theory of intellect, see (Davidson 1992, chp. 6–8).

5 For a general account of Latin Averroism, see (Marenbon 2007).

6 For an overview of Aquinas' critique of Averroes' theory of intellect, see (Taylor 1999).

7 Texts 1 and 2 are from (Aquinas 2002). For the Latin text, see (Aquinas 1889), henceforth, *ST*. The page number of the English text is in brackets.

8 There is an ongoing debate concerning whether, for Aquinas, intellectual cognitions of material things must be mediated through the intellectual awareness of the relevant intelligible species. An affirmative answer may lead one to the so-called representationist's reading, whereas a negative answer may lead one to a direct realist reading. In this article, I leave the question open. For a detailed examination of the debate, see (Baltuta 2013).

9 *ST*, I, q.84, a.4 (144): "Respondeo dicendum quod quidam posuerunt species intelligibiles nostri intellectus procedere ab aliquibus formis vel substantiis separatis. Et hoc dupliciter. Plato enim, sicut dictum est, posuit formas rerum sensibilium per se sine materia subsistentes; sicut formam hominis, quam nominabat per se hominem, et formam vel ideam equi, quam nominabat per se equum, et sic de aliis."

10 *ST*, I, q.84, a.4 (144): "Sed quia contra rationem rerum sensibilium est quod earum formae subsistant absque materiis, ut Aristoteles multipliciter probat; ideo Avicenna, hac positione remota, posuit omnium rerum sensibilium intelligibiles species, non quidem per se subsistere absque materia, sed praeexistere immaterialiter in intellectibus separatis; a quorum primo derivantur huiusmodi species in sequentem, et sic de aliis usque ad ultimum intellectum separatum, quem nominat intellectum agentem; a quo, ut ipse dicit, effluunt species intelligibiles in animas nostras, et formae sensibiles in materiam corporalem."

11 Note that Avicenna himself did distinguish between intelligible species and intelligible forms. Therefore, in Text 1, Aquinas's reconstruction of Avicenna's doctrine may not be historically accurate. In the next section, I will discuss how Aquinas's emanationist reading of Avicenna's theory of concept formation is currently the topic of a heated scholarly debate.

12 *ST*, I, q.84, a.4 (145–6): "Si autem dicatur, secundum Avicennam, quod sensus sunt animae necessarii, quia per eos excitatur ut convertat se ad intelligentiam agentem, a qua recipit species; hoc quidem non sufficit. Quia si in natura animae est ut intelligat per species ab intelligentia agente effluxas, sequeretur quod quandoque anima possit se convertere ad intelligentiam agentem ex inclinatione suae naturae, vel etiam excitata per alium sensum, ut convertat se ad intelligentiam agentem ad recipiendum species sensibilium quorum sensum aliquis non habet. Et sic caecus natus posset habere scientiam de coloribus, quod est manifeste falsum. Unde dicendum est quod species intelligibiles quibus anima nostra intelligit, non effluunt a formis separatis." Note that, in this text, when Aquinas points out that, for Avicenna, the human intellect receives the species of the sensibles (species sensibilium) from the agent intellect, the species of the sensibles refer to the intelligible form of the sensible. This is because, for Avicenna, only the intelligible forms emanate from the agent intellect.

13 See Text 3 in Section 2.

14 Aquinas insightfully notes that the emphasis of the role of the senses is not essential for Avicenna's theory of human intellection. One significant clue that justifies Aquinas' observation is Avicenna's well-known analogy of a horse and rider. According to Avicenna, in the process of concept acquisition, the relation between the rational soul and the senses is like that of a rider and a

horse crossing a river. Once the rider successfully crosses the river, they can abandon the horse and continue their journey on their own; likewise, when the intellect first acquires the intelligible form, the intellect itself becomes more powerful, such that it can trigger the re-awareness of the same form solely through its own will without relying on the senses. For the horse–rider analogy, see (Avicenna 1985, p. 374, ll. 8–14).

15 Texts 3 and 4 are from (Aquinas 1968). For the Latin text, see (Aquinas 1976, pp. 289–314), henceforth, *DUI,* followed by the chapter and passage number in the Latin text and the page number of the English text in brackets.

16 *DUI*, c. 3, par. 63 (49): "Dixit quod intelligere illius substantiae separatae est intelligere mei vel illius, in quantum intellectus ille possibilis copulatur mihi vel tibi per phantasmata quae sunt in me et in te. Quod sic fieri dicebat. Species enim intelligibilis, quae fit unum cum intellectu possibili, cum sit forma et actus eius, habet duo subiecta: unum ipsa phantasmata, aliud intellectum possibilem. Sic ergo intellectus possibilis continuatur nobiscum per formam suam mediantibus phantasmatibus; et sic, dum intellectus possibilis intelligit, hic homo intelligit."

17 For a detailed reconstruction of the two-subject theory, see (Davidson 1992, pp. 289–90).

18 For a detailed reconstruction of Aquinas's different arguments against UI, see (Wu 2017). It is worth noting that, in addition to the theoretical criticisms, Aquinas also argues that UI is not a faithful reading of Aristotle himself. For the purpose of this paper, I will solely focus on the theoretical dimension of Aquinas's critique. Whether Averroes's theory of intellect is a faithful interpretation of Aristotle's relevant doctrines, or whether Averroes indeed aims to present Aristotle faithfully, remains an open question.

19 DUI, c. 3, par. 65 (50): "Nisi forte dicatur quod intellectus possibilis continuatur phantasmatibus, sicut speculum continuatur homini cuius species resultat in speculo. Talis autem continuatio manifestum est quod non sufficit ad continuationem actus; manifestum est enim quod actio speculi, quae est repraesentare, non propter hoc potest attribui homini: unde nec actio intellectus possibilis propter praedictam copulationem posset attribui huic homini qui est Socrates, ut hic homo intelligeret."

20 One might point out that, in the mirror case, we do somehow attribute the images in the mirror to the man because, if one were asked to whom the image belongs, one could say that the image belongs to the man. Nonetheless, we should make a distinction between what the image is about and what possesses the image; however, in both cases, the term "belongs to" might be used in our natural language.

21 Text 5 is from (Avicenna 1959), henceforth *al-Nafs*; Text 6 is from (Avicenna 1956), henceforth *al-Burhān*; and Text 8 is cited from (Avicenna 2005), henceforth *al-Ilāhiyyāt*. Texts 5 and 6 are my own translation; Text 8 is revised based on Marmura's translation.

22 For a recent overview of the debate, see (Ogden 2020, pp. 2–7).

23 For the empiricist's reading, see (Gutas 2012a, pp. 391–436). For the rationalist's reading, see (Zarepour 2020, pp. 819–33; Kaukua 2020, pp. 215–40).

24 For Avicenna's account of perception, see (Avicenna 2013, p. 175, ll. 3–12, p. 176, ll. 1–6). For a detailed study of Avicenna's theory of sensation, see (Black 2014, pp. 185–214); for perception and intentionality, see (Kaukua 2014, pp. 215–42).

25 That people born blind cannot understand colour is not a self-evident thesis in contemporary cognitive science. See (Kim et al. 2021; Striem-Amit et al. 2018).

26 For Avicenna's account of the divine intellection, see (Avicenna 2005, p. 285, ll. 8–13).

27 Averroes, *Long Commentary on De Anima = Averrois Cordubensis Commentarium Magnum in Aristotelis De Anima Libros* (Averroes 1953), henceforth *LCDA*. For a detailed reconstruction of Averroes's discussion of different commentator's views on the material intellect, see (Davidson 1992, pp. 282–95).

28 The English translation is from (Averroes 2011, pp. 328–29).

29 A more detailed reconstruction of the infinite regress argument might run in the following way: Suppose the intelligible form can be individualised. If the intelligible form can be individualised, then the intelligible form must become a member of a natural species. If the intelligible form is a member of a natural species, then the intelligible form will have another intelligible form, and so on infinitely, which will in turn make the intellectual cognition impossible. However, one does have actual intellectual cognitions, so the intelligible form cannot proceed into infinity. Therefore, the intellectual cognition is possible, and the intelligible form cannot be individualised.

30 According to Ogden's new account of the infinite regress, if one has an individualised F in their mind, then there must be a universal and intelligible F* in their mind through which F occurs as an individualised form. Since F* itself is intelligible, one needs a further F**; thus, it proceeds to infinity. However, it is unclear why Averroes would accept the quasi-Platonic principle that an individualised concept subsists in the mind through the participation of its universal and intelligible species.

31 For Averroes's account of the apprehension of essence, see (Weimer 2019).

32 For a detailed reconstruction of Avicenna's quiddity–existence distinction, see (Bertolacci 2012, pp. 257–88); for Averroes's critical reworking of the quiddity–existence distinction, see (Menn 2011, pp. 51–96); and for a study of how Avicenna's quiddity–existence distinction is received in the post-Avicennian traditions, see (Benevich 2017, pp. 203–58).

33 It's important to note that the concept of intellectual subjectivity in the realm of the intelligible does not align with the realist perspective on universals. This stance is distinct in that it does not subscribe to universals as inherent in individual natural entities, nor does it adhere to Platonic forms.

[34] For a general introduction to *Ḥadīth al-Nawāfil* and its reception in the spiritual traditions of Islam, see (Ebstein 2018, pp. 271–89).

[35] For Ibn al-ʿArabī's account of *al-Nawāfil*, see (Chittick 1989, pp. 325–31).

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Article

Saadya on Necessary Knowledge

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Abstract: Most Muslim and Jewish Mutakallimūn accepted the definition of necessary knowledge as opposed to inferential knowledge, with one remarkable exception, namely, Saadya's problematic use of this term. He characterized some type of mediate knowledge as "necessary knowledge" and accordingly introduced a second-order necessary knowledge that is necessarily concomitant of the original one. This move may have marked a synthesis of the two main epistemological trends (classical intellectualism and analytical empiricism) at the time.

Keywords: Saadya; Jewish Kalām; epistemology; necessary knowledge

The distinction between necessary and acquired knowledge is the foundation of Kalām epistemology. The Jewish Mutakallimūn shared this framework with their Muslim peers, especially the Mu'tazilites. However, Saadya makes one remarkable exception, using the term "necessary knowledge" (*al-'ilm al-ḍarūrī*) in a problematic way: he seems to confuse the cognitive necessity of Kalām with the logical necessity of Falsafa. In this study, we will show that Saadya's account of necessary knowledge may be best understood in the vein of early and classical Kalām and that he in fact extended the Kalāmic epistemology by interpreting deduction in terms of cognitive necessity.

1. The Epistemological Background: Necessary Knowledge in Kalām

To begin with, we shall briefly look at some main points of Kalām's epistemology, both Islamic and Jewish, offering a reference of the standard use of "necessary knowledge" by mainstream Mutakallimūn.

The first point is the definition of knowledge:

> Knowledge is the notion that entails a sense of certainty [in] the soul (*al-ma'nā alladhī yaqtaḍī sukūn al-nafs*) of the knower at what he has obtained. ('Abd al-Jabbār 1960–1965, p. 16)[1]

The tenth to eleventh century Mu'tazilite master 'Abd al-Jabbār's definition represents the most widely accepted notion among the Mutakallimūn on the nature of knowledge. He highlights the most distinguishing characteristic of knowledge: certainty or repose (*sukūn*) that the convictions concerning some objects bring into the soul. It is remarkable that this certainty the Mutakallimūn are concerned with is a kind of subjective certainty, that is the knower's assurance or confidence of the truth of her belief, but not objective certainty, which concerns the logical (or causal) relation of the propositional contents (or objects) of knowledge.[2]

The first known Jewish Mutakallim al-Muqammaṣ (the ninth century) defines knowledge as "comprehending the reality of perceived objects with neither doubt nor uncertainty (*taḥqīq al-ashyā' al-madrūka bi-lā shakk wa-lā zann*) and establishing their cognizance by way

of noncontradictory definition and description".[3] Later, he characterizes the truth (*al-ḥaqq*) as "a proposition with which the speaker's soul is content (*taskun*), knowing that what he said is indeed as he said it and what he described is indeed how he described it".[4] Thus, for al-Muqammaṣ, the mental quality that makes an accurate description of the object knowledge or truth is certainty (or negatively, removal of uncertainty).

The classical Jewish Mutakallimūn, like Saadya and al-Qirqisānī, did not give such definitions of knowledge. But in their discussion of relevant issues, they presupposed the generally accepted notion of Kalām:

> And now that we have finished expounding, as much as we felt it desirable, the matter of resolving uncertainties and doubts, it behooves us to explain what is meant by conviction (*iʿtiqād*). We say that it is a notion that arises in the soul in regard to the actual state of anything that is known. When the cream of speculation emerges, when it is embraced and enfolded by the intellects and, through them acquired and digested by the souls, then the person becomes convinced of the truth of the notion he has thus acquired. He then deposits it in his soul for a future occasion or for future occasions, in accordance with the statement of Scripture: "Wise men lay up knowledge" [Prov. 10:14]. (Saadya 1880, p. 11; 1970, pp. 11–12)[5]

> [In order to establish knowledge of tradition:] therefore did He render the human mind susceptible to the acceptance of authenticated tradition and the human soul capable of finding repose (*li-ʿl-sukūn*) therein, so that His Scriptures and traditions might be acknowledged as true. (Saadya, L, 126; K, 130; R, 155–156)

> The words *gladden the heart* (Ps. 19:8) convey that the heart is at rest (*yaskun ilayhi al-qalb*) on account of the truth of premises and conclusions. The words *enlightening the eyes* (ibid.) allude to the light emanating from the word (*kalām*) and the removal of ambiguity therefrom. (Al-Qirqisānī 1918, pp. 17, 42)

Both Saadya and al-Qirqisānī take knowledge as a conviction that brings certainty regarding the reality of its object and remove doubt and ambiguity from the mind.

Certainty is the differentia of knowledge in both Islamic and Jewish Kalām. Therefore, the key question of their epistemology is where this certainty comes from. The answer lies in the sources of knowledge or its ways of occurrence:

> There are only two types of knowledge: One occurs by virtue of us in the ways mentioned above (speculation and inference), and is accordingly called acquired knowledge (*ʿilm muktasab*). By nature, it can be denied by its knower from his soul with uncertainty. . . The other is created by God in us, and accordingly called necessary knowledge (*ʿilm ḍarūrī*). Its definition is that which is impossible to be denied by its knower with uncertainty. (Ibn Mattawayh 2009, pp. 601–2)

> There are two kinds of knowledge [belonging to human beings and other animals]: the necessary and the acquired. Their difference lies in the fact that for the acquired knowledge, the knower has power (*qudra*) to know and infer it; for the necessary knowledge, neither his inference nor his power is involved in its occurrence. (Al-Baghdādī 1928, p. 8)

Thus, the Mutakallimūn divide knowledge into two types. One is acquired knowledge, which is obtained at our initiative through speculation and inference and achieves some degree of certainty but is always open to doubt. The other is necessary knowledge, which is imposed on us and occurs without conscious effort or choice on our part. In contrast to acquired knowledge, necessary knowledge is undoubted and accepted by all the sane people; in other words, its certainty is unshakable. In the classification of knowledge, the

Jewish Mutakallimūn were basically in line with their Muslim peers,[6] except Saadya. We will return to this point later.

According to the mainstream Kalām, necessary knowledge usually includes: sense perception; inner perception, which is self-consciousness of inner experience; perfection of intellect, which is the awareness of self-evident axioms in logic and morality; and reliable report, which is the path of revealed knowledge.[7]

'Abd al-Jabbār also provides another taxonomy of necessary knowledge, in which he divides it into the direct and indirect ones. The direct ones include inner perception and perfection of intellect, while the indirect comprise of sense perception and knowledge that occurs through what resembles a means (like the knowledge of the state through the knowledge of the essence).[8]

Regarding the use of the concept "necessary knowledge" among Jewish Mutakallimūn, we find the earliest case in al-Muqammaṣ. He classifies direct perception of external or internal objects as necessary knowledge:

> The claim of one who says that the world does not exist is unacceptable because of the self-imposing (*iḍṭirār*) realization of the existence of the world and also because of the self-imposing *(iḍṭirār*) realization of our own existence. (Al-Muqammaṣ 2016, pp. 48–49)

> All this (knowledge of the affliction of one's own body or removing of this affliction) is naturally understood by everyone; people know it intuitively (*iḍṭirār*) and are not troubled by any doubts about it. (Al-Muqammaṣ 2016, pp. 58–59)

Obviously al-Muqammaṣ understands the term "necessary" (*iḍṭirār*) in the sense of "compelling" and "primitive". Al-Qirqisānī, Saadya's younger contemporary, also juxtaposes necessary knowledge with sense perception, as opposed to speculation and inference (Al-Qirqisānī 1939–1943, p. 67).

As for the discussion of necessary knowledge in Jewish Kalām, it is mainly concerned with two issues. One is the question of if we can know God in a necessary way. Most Jewish Mutakallimūn agreed with the Mu'tazila that the knowledge of God is acquired through speculation, and thus not necessary knowledge.[9] The other issue is if the reliable traditions (especially that of Moses) can be established as necessary knowledge. Some Jewish theologians, such as Yūsuf al-Baṣīr (d. 1040), argued with Muslim and pagan opponents for the necessity of the testimony of Moses' prophecy and miracles by the Jewish community (See Sklare 2021, pp. 117, 125). It should be noted that during the inter-religious polemic on the validity of traditions, the universality of necessary knowledge seems to be compromised: it may be a knowledge only potentially known to every person, the occurrence of which depends on specific circumstances.

2. Saadya's Necessary Knowledge

In the *Amānāt*, Saadya enumerates four kinds of knowledge:

> We declare that there are three [such] bases. The first is the knowledge of observation; the second, the knowledge of the intellect, and the third, the knowledge that necessity compels to (*ma dafa'at al-darūra illayhi*)... As for ourselves, the community of monotheists, we accept these three bases of knowledge to be true. To them, however, we add a fourth base, which we have derived by means of the [other] three, and which has thus become for us a further principle. That is the validity of authentic tradition. (L, 12–14; K, 14–15; R, 16–18)

It is difficult to categorize the third one in the Kalāmic dichotomy of knowledge, though Saadya repeatedly called it "necessary knowledge":

> Knowledge of necessities (*ʿilm al-ḍarūriyāt*) is that which, if not accepted as true, would compel his denial of a sensible or intelligible. Since, however, he cannot very well negate either of these two, the fact forces him (*al-ʾamr yaḍṭirruhu*) to regard the notion as being correct. Thus, we are forced (*nuḍṭarr*) to affirm, although we have never seen it, that man possesses a soul, in order not to deny its manifest activity. [We are] also [forced to affirm], although we have never seen it, that every soul is endowed with intellect, in order not to deny the latter's manifest activity. (L, 13; K, 14; R, 16–17)

> Besides that it confirms for us the validity of necessary knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-ḍarūrī*), [that is to say] that whatever leads to the rejection of the sensible or intelligible is false. (L, 15; K, 16; R, 19)

> As for the knowledges of necessities (*al-ḍarūriyāt min al-ʿulūm*), when our senses perceive and verify something, and when the conviction of that thing can be held in our souls only by virtue of the simultaneous conviction of other things, we must be convinced of all these things, be they few or many in number, since the sense percept in question arises only by means of them (*yaqūm… illā bihā*). (L, 16; K, 18; R, 21)

Against the background of Kalām terminology (both Islamic and Jewish), Saadya's account of necessary knowledge is peculiar because he includes in this category some mediate knowledge that should be seen by most Mutakallimūn as inference and thus as acquired or non-necessary knowledge. And his characterization of this necessary knowledge, "*ma dafaʿat al-darūra illayhi*" ("what necessity compels to"), reminds us of Aristotle's idiom "follow by necessity" (*lazim… min al-iḍṭirār*) in his definition of syllogism and his interpretation of necessity in terms of logical entailment in demonstration.[10] Wolfson (1942, p. 233) and Efros (1942, p. 149) identify Saadya's necessary knowledge as Aristotle's demonstration or scientific knowledge. Does Saadya try to replace or correct the Kalām epistemology with a Peripatetic one?

To answer this question, we should make sure first that Saadya is acquainted with the use of the term necessity from both sides. In two other places of the *Amānāt*, Saadya uses the term *ḍarūr* in the sense of perception:

> If, again, we assumed that these attributes appertained to them (spiritual atoms) after they had attained the composite status, then that part of these beings which is with us would necessarily (*bi-ʾl-ḍarūra*) be within our reach. (L, 45; K, 48; R, 54)

> But suppose we note that the [pretended] prophet pays no attention to us but makes us witness the miracles and marvels so that we see them perforce (*ḍarūra*). What shall we say to him in that case? (L, 133; K, 136; R, 164)

Efros found in Saadya's commentaries to the Hebrew Bible one case where he uses *ḍarūr* in the way of Kalām and several other places where he uses the term *iktisāb* ("to acquire") in the sense of inference (Efros 1942, p. 134, n.1; p. 150, n. 36). Here we just quote the passage in his commentary to the Book of Job, where both the terms "necessary" and "acquire" appear:

> The wisdom (for intellect to infer the Creator's attributes from His creatures) *needs time to acquire* (*iktisāb*) [Kafih/Goodman: for it does not develop automatically (*bi-ḍarūra*) in a person but must be acquired]. Then it says that the wisdom in this state is as valid as knowledge of senses and necessity (*ʿilm al-ḥawās wa-ʾl-ḍarūrāt*), deducing for us that the Creator his wisdom with him. (Saadya 1899, p. 40; 1973, p. 86; 1988, p. 247)

Now we know for certain that Saadya is aware of the Kalām distinction between necessary and acquired knowledge. As for the paradigm of demonstrative necessity, he has some knowledge of the Organon: he refers to the ten categories and to *Isagoge*, though never mentions Aristotle's name (See Stroumsa 2002, pp. 27–28). If his agenda is to introduce the Peripatetic logic, it would be odd to notice that he mentioned no formal requirement of definition and syllogism in the discussion of necessary knowledge. He did not even use the terms inference/*istidlāl* or demonstration/*burhān* in characterizing the necessary knowledge. He does use the term *burhān* elsewhere, but not in the sense of Aristotelian demonstration, for example, he talks about "the miraculous proofs" (*barāhīn al-ʾayāt*) as opposed to "the intellectual proofs" (*al-barāhīn al-ʿaqliyya*).[11] Furthermore, Saadya insists the priority of perception over all the other knowledge:

> By rejecting the first source (perception), they have automatically rejected the second (intellection) and the third ("necessary knowledge"), since the latter two are based upon the first. (L, 13; K, 14; R, 17)[12]

This is a radical empiricist stance, which is typical in Kalām but hardly compatible with any classical understanding of scientific knowledge (neither Platonic nor Aristotelian). In light of all this, Haggai Ben-Shammai suggests that the necessity in Saadya's definition of necessary knowledge is not logical necessity but refers to the immediate knowledge, namely perception and intuition (Ben-Shammai 1977, I, p. 86, n. 177; 2005, p. 112, n.74). I agree with Ben-Shammai in locating Saadya back in the vein of Muʿtazilite Kalām to understand his theory of knowledge, which is also the approach shared by Vajda (1948) and Hegedus (2013). We shall see if we can interpret Saadya's necessary knowledge in the Kalāmic sense of necessity, namely, the compulsiveness in the occurrence of knowledge as a mental state other than the logical necessity in the propositional contents (or the causality between the objects) of knowledge. Following this approach, the definition *ma dafaʿat al-ḍarūra illayhi* should be interpreted as what perception and intellectual intuition compel to. These two are the necessary knowledge in the original sense and that which they force us to accept is a second-order necessary knowledge. The latter is what Saadya means by *al-ʿilm al-ḍarūrī*. But a further question is how perception and intuition drive us to this knowledge, in other words, where does this compelling force come from?

The branch "that which occurs through what resembles a means" (*mā yaḥṣul ʿammā yajrī majrā al-ṭarīq*) in ʿAbd al-Jabbār's taxonomy of necessary knowledge may shed some light on the mechanism of the second-order necessary knowledge's occurrence:

> That which occurs in us through a means is the knowledge of the perceptible things, and perception is the means to it. That which occurs through what resembles a means is like the knowledge of the state (*hāl*) together with the knowledge of the essence (*dhāt*), and the knowledge of the essence is a root (*aṣl*) of the knowledge of the state and resembles a means to the knowledge of the latter. The difference between what occurs in us through a means and what resembles a means is that, it is possible for the former to persist without a means; yet, this is not the case in the latter. Therefore, God may create in us a knowledge of perceptible things without perception, but may not create a knowledge of the state without a knowledge of the essence; for the knowledge of essence is a root for that of the state, and resembles a means to the latter. (ʿAbd al-Jabbār 1996, p. 50; Ibrahim 2013b, p. 112)

The example he gives is the knowledge of the state of a thing and knowledge of its essence. The knowledge of the essence is a necessary condition to know the state. Therefore, the knowledge of the essence is like a means to that of the state, in other words, the former is the root of the latter.

This kind of necessary knowledge is related to the co-presence of two knowledges that have an essential connection: without the root (knowledge of the essence), the branch (knowledge of the state) cannot occur. It causes difficulties in interpretation among modern scholars. 'Uthman points out that this sub-division of necessary knowledge is problematic, for if it is about the state of ourselves, it will fall in the category of direct knowledge, and if it is about the state of objects other than us, it is not necessary but inferential.[13] M. R. Ibrahim also notes that this kind of knowledge could be included in the direct knowledge, as a case of intellectual axioms, and suggests that 'Abd al-Jabbār specifies a separate sub-division for it in order to establish the hierarchical order of knowledge (such as the priority of reason over tradition) (Ibrahim 2013b, pp. 112–14).

In fact, this knowledge is not about the state or the essence, but about their relation: neither of these two but their connection has to be necessarily known, more precisely, the epistemological priority of root or the dependence of the branch on the root is necessary. Given that without root there is no branch, the fact that we attain the branch entails that we have grasped the root in advance or simultaneously and that the occurrence of the branch presupposes the presence of the root in our mind. We find such a case in 'Abd al-Jabbār's discussion of perception and the concomitant knowledge of existence:

> In perception, we know that the perceived thing exists, even though perception does not relate [directly] to this attribute. However, since the attribute which is perceived cannot be realized without the existence of this thing, we must know that it exists. This knowledge is like the root of the knowledge of the specific essential attribute. Therefore, as we perceive [the attribute] which cannot appear in other things, we know the perceived thing, even if we do not know any [other] state of it, like [in the case of perception of] sound. (*Mughnī*, XII, 61–62)

During the perception, what we directly perceive is the attribute of a thing, but along with this direct perception, we know the thing exists. These two knowledges are necessarily concomitant with each other. In fact, the knowledge of the existence of the perceived thing is not inferred from the knowledge of the perceived attribute, because firstly, they are simultaneously present; secondly, according to the epistemological order mentioned above (the former is the root of the latter and the knowledge of the state presupposes the knowledge of the essence), such an inference will be a circular argument.

Now we have an essential connection between knowledges: without the root, the branch cannot occur; if the branch is present, the root must be co-present (or re-present). In term of Kalām, we can say the branch necessarily draws us to the root. It is interesting to note that some Mutakallimūn, mostly Ash'arites, made use of this necessary co-presence to prove the existence or attribute of God from his creations. Davison has summarized these arguments: they are either from the generation of the world to its generator, or from the world's equal possibility of existing and not existing to its particularizor (Davidson 1987, pp. 154–61). As al-Ghazālī rightly put, none of these is in reality a proof but just an explanation of the terms "generator" (*ḥādith*) and "cause" (*sabab*). If their meaning is made clear, the mind will necessarily (*muḍṭarr*) accept the truth of the principle that every generated thing has a cause.[14] Similarly, his master, Juwaynī states that the observation of the perfect order of the world will forcefully (*yuḍṭarr*) lead to the knowledge of God's wisdom and power.[15]

Now we have seen the mainstream Kalām allows some essential connection between knowledges. We shall see if this works for Saadya's second-order necessary knowledge. In the meantime, we should take into account that all the sources mentioned above, including 'Abd al-Jabbār, Juwaynī, and al-Ghazālī, are later than Saadya and also that Saadya does not stick to any specific doctrine of Kalām, but is much more flexible or eclectic than the Muslim and Karaite Mutakallimūn.

It seems that Saadya's definition of necessary knowledge as the concomitant of the perception or intuition basically conforms to the root–branch or essence–state connection. They share the same structure of necessary condition. In two places, he used plural form of knowledge (*'ulūm*) and necessity (*ḍarūriyyāt*), which implies that the necessary knowledge in question is about the relation of knowledges (L, 13, 16; K, 14, 18; R, 16–17, 21). The examples he illustrates for the single-concomitant cases (L, 13, 17; K, 14, 18; R, 17, 21), such as voice–person and soul/intellect activities, can be included in the category of connection between knowledges of essence and of state, except the fire–smoke case, but smoke may be seen as a state of fire. Besides, this can also explain the fact that Saadya does not refer to inference or proof in defining the second-order necessary knowledge, because he has the co-presence of two knowledges in mind and this kind of necessary knowledge is not bound to be inferential. His real divergency from the mainstream Kalām manifests in the expansion of the number of the knowledges involved:

> Now these [necessary postulates] may be one, or they may be two or three or four or more than that. . . As an illustration of a single [concomitant] let it be supposed that we see smoke. . . We must assume the existence of the fire because of the existence of the smoke since the one can be complete (*yatimm*) only by means of the other. Likewise if we hear the voice of a human being from behind a wall, we must assume the existence of that human being. . . As an example, again, of more than one [concomitant phenomenon] that must be postulated, the following might be cited.] When, for instance, we see food go down in bulk in the belly of an animate being, and its refuse come out from it, then, unless we assume [that] four operations [were involved in the process], what has been perceived by our senses could not have been complete (*yatimm*). . . Sometimes, too, our conviction of the reality of what we observe becomes complete (*yatimm*) only by the invention of a science (*ṣinā'a*) that verifies it for us. We may even be compelled to resort to many such sciences. (L, 16–17; K, 18; R, 21–22)

> Now all this is demonstrable only by means of the art of geometry, which shows us how one figure is subsumed under others through construction, after we have known the simples from which they are composed. . . We must, therefore, acknowledge all these sciences as being correct, since it is only by means of them that our conviction of the variation of the moon's course by natural law can be complete (*yatimm*). (L, 18; K, 20; R, 23)

For both the Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite, the necessary connection usually consists in only two knowledges. This is to guarantee their co-presence in mind. When Saadya extends this relation to multiple pieces of knowledge, he sacrifices the immediacy of necessary knowledge. Those knowledges from the second onward are not present at the moment when the perception occurs. And we notice that Saadya repeatedly uses the term *yatimm* ("to be complete"), which implies that the necessary knowledges are meant to be a whole within which every part entails each other. But for any specific human knower, he or she may only attain part of the whole structure at a time, while the other parts are necessarily knowable in potential. Following the proper procedure of analysis, we may actualize this chain piece by piece. In view of this, we can understand in what sense Saadya claims all the knowledge lies potentially in the intellect:

> The audible things are discovered by the organ of hearing, and man testifies (*shahid*): this is what I have heard and none other. The same is true of the other organs of sensation. Similarly there is in the intellect a knowing force which, when confronted by intellectual matters, verifies them, so that the person becomes convinced that they are undoubtedly the concepts. According to this example all

> knowledge lies concealed in the intellect (*maknūn fī al-ʿaql*); and the purpose of learning and inference (*iktisāb*) is only to discover it after its awakening, so that when it stands before the mind, the mind testifies concerning it that it is the truth. Therefore, this book with its speculation is intended to remind of (*yunabbihū*) what is in the intellect and to awaken (*yuyaqqizū*) what used to be neglected. (Saadya 1894, p. 9; Efros 1942, p. 147)

According to Saadya, all the sensual and intellectual knowledges have been witnessed and preserved in the intellect, but some of them are in a hidden or neglected state. With regard to this "concealed" knowledge, the role of inference and speculation is just to remind the intellect and draw its attention to the object (or the proper aspect of the object), so that the truth concerning this object becomes directly accessible to the intellect. Similarly, we find the Bahshamite school also acknowledge that people can be unaware of their own state of knowledge and that when someone neglects or even denies his own necessary knowledge, we cannot prove it to him in an inferential way but should remind (*yunabbih*) him of it by revealing his self-contradiction.[16] Saadya seems to apply this principle of the reminder (*tanbīh*) to the second-order necessary knowledge. And he has good reason to do so: since even the simple sensation or intellectual intuition can be non-transparent to the mind, all the more so for the knowledge of their essential connection.

In addition to the role of reminder, Saadya also uses speculation as means of testing the allegations of necessary knowledge:

> If we seek to establish the truth of [a conviction] in the domain of necessary knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-ḍarūrī*), we must guard it against the above-mentioned five types of vitiating factors: [a] that there is no other [means than the theory in question] of sustaining the truth of what is perceived; nor [b] any other [method] of upholding what is known [by intellect]; [c] it must not invalidate any other truth; nor [d] must one part of it contradict another; let alone [e] that [a theory] be adopted that is worse than the one that has been rejected.
>
> [All] these [precautions are to be taken] in addition to exercising, in the determination of the sensible and the intelligible, such expert care as we have outlined before. Add to these the quality of perseverance until the art of speculation (*ṣināʿa al-naẓar*) has been completed, and we have a total of seven points that must be observed to make possible for us the accurate emergence of the truth (*kharajat lanā al-ḥaqīqa ṣaḥīḥatan*). (L, 20; K, 22; R, 25–26) [17]

Under these conditions, speculation shows the deductive closure of necessary knowledge, and any conviction failing to satisfy this criterion is excluded. It should be noted that inference can serve as a tool to test or disclose necessary knowledge but not a mechanism to produce it, for the latter, be it actual or potential, has already existed in the mind. And it does not constitute a defining characteristic of the second-order necessary knowledges, because some of them (such as most single-concomitant cases) need no reminder to trigger, and even for the multi-concomitant cases, once actualized, the necessary connection of the knowledges becomes self-evident and compulsive to us, without resorting to reasoning anymore.[18]

At the end of his discussion about the sources of knowledge in the introduction of *KAI*, Saadya points to a parallel between necessary knowledge and reliable tradition:

> Should, therefore, someone come to us with an allegation in the realm of necessary knowledge, we would test his thesis by means of these seven [criteria]. If, upon being rubbed by their touchstone and weighed by their balance, it turns out to be correct as well as acceptable, we shall make use of it. Similarly also must

> we proceed with the subject matters of authentic tradition—I mean the books of prophecy. (L, 20; K, 22–23; R, 26)

As long as these two are both knowledge through means—other knowledge(s) or the testimony of others—their validity is not that manifest and thus needs to go through a series of examinations. Besides, there is a deeper affinity in their realization, as Saadya points out in the next section:

> In this way, then—may God be merciful unto thee—do we conduct our speculation and inquiry, to the end that we may expound concretely (*nukhrij ilā fi'l*) what our Master has imparted unto us by means of knowledge and necessity (*bi-'l-'ilm wa-bi-'l-ḍarūra*).[19] With this thesis, however, there is intimately bound up a point that we cannot avoid. It consists of the question: "... Where was the wisdom in God's transmitting them by means of prophecy and supporting them by means of visible miraculous proofs (*barāhīn al-'ayāt al-mar'iyya*), rather than the intellectual ones (*al-barāhīn al-'aqliyya*)?" (L, 24; K, 27; R, 31)

Here the "knowledge and necessity" refers to the revealed knowledge supported by the compelling visibly miraculous proofs. This religious knowledge can be actualized into intellectual knowledge through speculating and inquiring its rational reasons. Similarly, in the case of necessary knowledge, through speculation and inference, the "hidden" essential connection between knowledges emerges in our mind.

3. Contextual and Philosophical Explanations

Regarding the concept of necessary knowledge, Saadya's primary source is undoubtedly the Islamic Kalām. His characterization of the first two kinds of knowledge conforms to the Mu'tazilites' basic understanding of necessary knowledge, while his original contribution is to develop the third kind of knowledge, namely a second-order necessary knowledge. He makes use of two Kalāmic concepts, employing the co-present connection between knowledges as a link to transmit the property of necessity (a combination of forcefulness, undoubtedness, and universal acceptance) from the necessary antecedent to the consequent and applying the non-transparency of knowledge to the inapparent second-order necessary knowledge. Therefore, his "reform" agenda is not to replace the Kalām epistemology with the classical concept of scientific knowledge, but to construe logical necessity in term of cognitive necessity as necessarily known in potential and thus integrate deductive knowledge into the Kalām category of necessary knowledge.[20] By doing so, he establishes necessary knowledge as a deductively closed set that can be extended as long as "a science" or "many sciences".

His train of thought may be sketched as follows:

1. S necessarily knows that *p*;
2. *p* deductively entails *q*, meaning that the knowledge of *q* is contained in the knowledge of *p*;
3. So, S necessarily knows that *q* (though this knowledge could possibly be non-transparent to S).

In this vein, deductive knowledge is essentially a chain of necessary knowledge, not only the starting point but also each step (if sliced thinly enough) of which is epistemically compulsive and intuitive. As for the non-deductive inferences, they are always open to alternatives, and accordingly to doubt.

As mentioned above, Saadya's discussion of necessary knowledge does not betray any commitment to the Aristotelian demonstrative model. From the scientific examples Saadya gives to illustrate the multi-concomitant cases, we can see clearly that his paradigm of science is geometry, astronomy, and medicine; in other words, his concept of science

is a pre-Aristotelian-turn one.[21] Saadya's first example (four digestive force-operations) derives from Galen's *On the Natural Faculties* (III. viii) (Galen 1916). And we find in the Arabic Galen corpus the use of term "necessary knowledge":

> Only those who have necessary knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-iḍṭirārī al-wājib*) may confirm that every [individual of the species] has the substance which the paradigm has. . . As for the connection based on the course of habit, there is no certain, necessary and demonstrative knowledge (*ʿilm yaqīn al-wājib idtirārī burhānī*) in it at all. (Kraus 1935, pp. 417–18)[22]

> The point of this argument is that, if man is compounded from a single element, the syllogism necessarily (*ḍarūratan*) implies that he cannot feel pain, since there would be nothing that would make him feel pain. . . The basis of this syllogism is sensation and is a matter of consensus. Its premises follow from that basis by means of demonstration (*burhān*), and its conclusion follows from it by demonstration. (*On the Elements*, Walbridge 2014, p. 151)

The Arabic translators and critics of Galen called demonstrative knowledge "necessary knowledge" and juxtaposed two terms denoting necessity (*iḍṭirārī* and *wājib*). Compared to the Aristotelian version, Galen's demonstration is less neat in form but more empirical and applicable to the particulars, taking after the model of geometry and focusing on the essential connection between the perceived facts.[23] Saadya may have come across such cases of necessary knowledge in the Galen corpus or other related scientific works, seeing in it a point of contact to bridge Kalām's cognitive necessity (*ḍarūra*) and the Hellenistic logical necessity (*wujūb*).

It should be noted that Saadya's conception of necessary knowledge is, in general, similar to the Stoic understanding of demonstration, which, as one type of sign, is an argument based on the kataleptic impression of the individuals and revealing the conclusion contained potentially in the premises.[24] Given that there is no evidence of Saadya's access to the Stoic logic and epistemology,[25] it may be seen as a recurrence of the Hellenistic intellectual movement under similar circumstances in the Medieval Islamicate world.

From a broader perspective, we may find Saadya has more fellow travelers. 'Abd Jabbār reported there is a group called *Aṣḥāb al-Maʿārif* ("the ones who have knowledge"), represented by the ninth century Muʿtazilite al-Jāḥiẓ, who claim that it is possible to have necessary knowledge of God in this world ('Abd al-Jabbār 1996, p. 52). And there is a sub-group in these people of knowledge:

> There is disagreement among the ones who have knowledge: some of them said that all the knowledge [of God] is through revelation (*ilhām*) and did not make speculation an obligation; others said that all the knowledge occurs through a natural substratum (*ṭabʿ al-maḥall*) when speculating, and then obligated [people] to speculate on Him, but not in the same way we obligated. ('Abd al-Jabbār 1996, p. 67)

The latter acknowledged the obligation of speculating on God and placed a special faculty within human nature—which is usually called *fitra* by other authors (Abrahamov 1993, pp. 26–27)—to guarantee the theological speculation to produce necessary knowledge.

Qirqisānī also reported that there are some defenders of rational speculation who claim the truth of inference can be known necessarily:

> Some responders [to the objection against speculation and inference] replied that they know that the judgment of something is necessarily the same with that of its like, and claimed that they know the truth of the inference necessarily. (*K. Anwār*, II 6.6)

Here, Qirqisānī is not necessarily referring to Saadya. But the latter does share the goal with this cross-denominational movement, that is, to establish the theological speculation as necessary knowledge. The epistemology of Kalām posed a problem of the certainty of religious knowledge. According to its distinction of necessary and acquired knowledge, the existence of God (as the imperceptible cause of the world) can only be known by means of inference, and accordingly, the knowledge regarding God is not necessary. The certainty of acquired knowledge is weaker than that of necessary knowledge. Speculation and inference are always accompanied by the possibility of being doubted. The Mu'tazilites postponed this difficulty to the afterlife and affirmed that God can be seen in the paradise ('Abd al-Jabbār 1996, pp. 52, 57). The Ash'arites admitted the possibility that God can transform acquired knowledge into a necessary one, just like He created in Adam necessary knowledge about the names of all the living things (Al-Baghdādī 1928, p. 15; Abrahamov 1993, p. 22). Some theologians, like the *Aṣḥāb al-Ma'ārif* mentioned above, tried to specify how to obtain the object of speculative knowledge in a necessary way, either through revelation or through a special faculty ('Abd al-Jabbār 1996, pp. 52, 67). This mystic approach was developed later by Sufi-inclined thinkers such as Avicenna, al-Ghazālī, and Judah Halevi. They placed a super-sense above the ordinary human rational faculty, by means of which the mystical practitioner can directly witness the divine being (Lobel 2000, pp. 89–102).

However, Saadya proposed another approach to addressing this theo-epistemological problem. He did not add any extraordinary cognitive faculty but chose to reformulate the ordinary ones. He interpreted the logical entailment as a kind of essential connection between direct perceptions, which has compelling power in potential over our mind. By investigation and inference, one would be in a position to disclose some hidden part of this connection and release its epistemic force, proceeding along the chain of necessary knowledge gradually from the concrete to the subtle up to the last terminal, namely the knowledge of God, which he described as "the first, the premise and the noblest" among the rational knowledge (*'ilm al-tamyīz*).[26]

In regard to reconciling the Kalām theory of cognition with the Greek logic and sciences, Saadya is neither alone nor the first one: this trend can be traced back to as early as al-Muqammaṣ and also be found in al-Qirqisānī. In fact, it is a characteristic of Jewish Kalām. The early Jewish Mutakallimūn seem to be more committed to Greek sources than their contemporary Muslim peers, which may be due to their association with the Syrian Christian scholars (Al-Muqammaṣ 2016, Stroumsa's Introduction, pp. xv–xxiv). The confluence of Kalām and philosophy happened later in the Islamic thought, in the eleventh to twelfth century, promoted by Avicenna, al-Juwaynī, and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.[27]

The result of this confluence in epistemology is the synthesis of intellectualism from classical Greek philosophy and analytical empiricism represented by Islamic Kalām.[28] Saadya offers an original agenda for this common cause: it brings intelligible causality into the realm of necessary knowledges characterized by the mainstream Kalām as atomistic mental states allowing only minimal co-present connections, and expands the latter into a network of scientific knowledge extending in both synchronic and diachronic ways. It is remarkable that his scientific paradigm (a set of apodeictic knowledge of the sensible particulars, modeled after geometry, astronomy, and medicine) belongs to the practicing scientists represented by the physician Galen rather than the speculative philosophers, which distinguishes Saadya's agenda from most of his fellow travelers in later generations who more or less accepted the Aristotelian model of science, though they shared the same motivation to establish theology in the most certain form of knowledge, in other words, to invent a "science of [the Revealed] Law in its true sense" (Maimonides 1963, p. 5). In this

respect, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, who developed an alternative to Aristotelian science based on the epistemological principles of Kalām, seems to have followed in Saadya's footsteps.[29]

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Notes

1 For the English translations, see (Peters 1976, pp. 47–48); Richard Frank (1971, p. 6).

2 As for the distinction between subjective and objective certainty in medieval philosophy, see Robert Pasnau (2017, p. 29, n. 6).

3 See (Al-Muqammaṣ 2016, pp. 36–37). In the context, al-Muqammaṣ provides two definitions and this is the first one. The second one defines knowledge as the soul's apprehention of the form of the sensibles and the intelligibles, whose hylemorphic terminololy, as well as dichotomy of sensible and intelligible, has an Aristotelian overtone.

4 See Ibid., pp. 42–43. The concept of truth here requires more than the normal condition of correspondence between belief and fact, and seems closer to the concept of knowledge. It is noteworthy that al-Muqammaṣ follows the correspondence theory in his own definition of truth provided earlier (ibid., pp. 40–41).

5 For the English translation, see (trans. S. Rosenblatt) (Saadya 1948, p. 14). Hereafter, the two editions of *K. al-Amānāt wa'l-I'tiqādāt* (*KAI*, Saadya 1880, 1970) are referred to respectively as L and K and Rosenblatt's translation (Saadya 1948) as R. The English translation has been slightly modified.

6 See, e.g., (Al-Qirqisānī 1939–1943, pp. 64–71); Aaron ben Elijah, *Ets Hayyim*, Chapter Eighty, in Daniel Frank (1991, pp. 18–20).

7 In early Kalām the status of the last one is controversial. There were some theologians, like the Baghdadi school of the Mu'tazilites, who did not accept tradition or testimony as necessary knowledge, see (Al-Baghdādī 1928, p. 12; Sklare 2021, p. 121).

8 *Sharḥ*, 50–51; *Mughnī*, 12: 56–66.

9 See, e.g., (Yūsuf al-Baṣīr 1985), *Muhtawī*, 2.640.

10 *Prior Analytics*, 24b18-20; *Topica*, 100a25-27; *Metaphysics*, 1015b7-9. For the medieval Arabic translation of these texts, see A. R. Badawi, *Manṭiq Arsiṭū*, Beirut: Dar al-qalam, 1980, pp. 142, 489; Averroes, *Tafsir ma ba'd at-tabi'a*, ed. Maurice Bouyges, Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1938, pp. 516–17.

11 *KAI*, L, 24; K, 27; R, 31.

12 In his commentary to *Sefer Yetzirah*, Saadya also emphasizes sense perception's status as primary source of truth with no doubt and base the proof of the Creator on this truth, see (Saadya 1891, p. 38).

13 'Uthman, *Naẓariyyat al-Taklīf*, 1971, p. 60.

14 See (Al-Ghazālī 1962), *I'tiqād*, pp. 25–26. For English translation, see Yaqub 2013, pp. 28–29.

15 See (Juwaynī 1950), *Irshād*, 1950, p. 61. For English translation, see Walker 2000, p. 36.

16 ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Mughnī*, vol. 12, pp. 37, 42, 45, 71; for a discussion of the issue, see (Benevich 2022b, pp.12–15, 26–28). From the fact that ʿAbd al-Jabbār ascribes this position to Abū Hāshim and defends it as a reply to al-Jāḥiẓ, it is most likely to be an early Mu'tazilite stance.

17 Related to this, when elaborating these conditions, Saadya uses the terms "analogy" (*qiyās*), "proof" (*dalīl*), and "inference" (*istidlāl*) to describe the process of approaching and weighing the alleged necessary knowledge (L, 19; K, 21; R, 24).

18 A similar view can be found in Ibn Taymiyya, *Darʾ taʿāruḍ al-ʿaql wa-l-naql, aw Muwāfaqat ṣaḥīḥ al-manqūl li-ṣarīḥ al-maʿqūl*. ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim. Riyadh: Dār al-Kunūz al-Adabiyya, 1979, 9:28–29.

19 I follow Landauer's reading, while Kafih includes the phrase "bi-'l-ḍarūra" in the next sentence, which already has an adverbial "lā budd". Putting a double emphasis on such a rhetorical question would be quite superfluous.

20 Interestingly enough, al-Fārābī's account of certitude (*yaqīn*) is like a reverse image of this agenda: he insists that only demonstration and intellectual intuition can bring about absolute or necessary certitude, while admiting lesser degrees of certitude (such as non-necessary and accidental certitude) to accommodate immediate sensible abservations and testimonies as inferior forms of knowledge, in which the Kalām concept of certainty (*sukūn al-nafs*) is listed as "the most remote assent from certitude", see (Black 2006, pp. 11–45).

[21] For the "Aristotelian turn" in the Arabic reception of Hellenic sciences advocated by al-Fārābī, see (Koetschet 2022, pp. 275–76, 287). Another remarkable pre-Aristotelian-turn figure is al-Kindī who takes mathemathics represented by Euclid and Ptolemy as the scientific ideal, see (Adamson 2007, pp. 33–38; Gutas 1998, p. 120; Pasnau 2017, pp. 27, 177).

[22] Koetschet identified this text as part of al-Rāzī's *Doubts on Galen* (Koetschet 2022, pp. 282–85). The terms "necessary knowledge" appears in a context where the author elaborates three sorts of sign-inference from the manifest to the hidden (respectively based on paradigm, habit and trace-endeixis), contrasts the first two sorts with necessary knowledge, and seems to imply that the trace indicating to the nature of things has a close relation with demonstration. As for the Stoic origin of sign-inference in Kalāmic logic and its relation to Saadya, see (Van Ess 1970, pp. 26–50; Ben-Shammai 2005, p. 112, n.74).

[23] See (Morison 2008, pp. 66–115); Hankinson, "Epistemology", ibid., pp. 165–78.

[24] For demonstration in Stoicism, see *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, ed. and trans. A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, vol.1, pp. 213–14; R. J. Hankinson, "Stoic Epistemology", in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, ed. Brad Inwood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 78–79, Susanne Bobzien, "Logic", ibid., pp. 112–13; Ludwig Edelstein, *The Meaning of Stoicism*, London: Oxford University Press, 1966, pp. 27–28.

[25] Efros traced Saadya's epistemology back to Stoicism, though offering no proof but similarities (1942, pp. 136–37, 139–42, 157–58). Josef van Ess suggested the Stoic logic elements in Kalām may have originated from Greco-Roman rhetoric tradition in Late Antique and Early Islam, but also admitted that the legacy of the latter is a synthesis of different schools and thus not distinctly Stoic (Van Ess 1970, pp. 32–33).

[26] See (Saadya 1894, p. 127); L, pp. 73, 77; K, pp. 76, 80; R, pp. 87, 92. The tenth century Jewish thinker Abū al-Khayr's statement may echo this thesis: "[The knowledge of God] is necessary from the perspective of the intellect, and inferential from the perspective of the sense perception." (al-Tawḥīdī, *al-Muqābasāt*, ed. M. Hussein, Tehran: Markaz Nashar Daneshgahi, 1987, p. 174).

[27] See (Wisnovsky 2003, pp. 146–60; 2012, pp. 27–50).

[28] For the analytical empiricism in Kalām and its "eastern" (Central Asian and Indian) origins, see (Dong 2018). I borrowed the term from Hao Wang, see (Wang 1985). By analytical empiricism, I mean an epistemological position holding that knowledge is primarily sense perception and conceptual knowledge is all but a conventional ordering of perceptions. In contrast, intellectualism refers to the stance that knowledge can only be attained by the intellect, while perceptions are no knowledge in its true sense but at most its raw materials.

[29] Bilal Ibrahim characterized Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's alternative programme to the Aristotelian–Avicennian essentialist science as phenomenalism, see (Ibrahim 2013a, pp. 379–431); Benevich analyzed the arguments of al-Rāzī, al-Suhrawardī, and Abū l-Barakat al-Baghdadī against Peripatetic scientific definition and identified their epistemological approach as a "unified direct realism", see (Benevich 2022a, pp. 72–108). We do not suggest that al-Rāzī was under the influence of Saadya (for it is unlikely for any major medieval Musilim authors like al-Rāzī to have access to the Jewish Kalām works), but just intend to point to the common cause and approach shared by these two thinkers. A comparative research of Saadya's and al-Rāzī's (and possibly others') projects of the scientific ideal is in order, and yet goes beyond the scope of this study.

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Article

Averroesian Religious Common Sense Natural Theology as Reflective Knowledge in the Form of Teleological Argument

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Abstract: In his *Middle Commentary on Posterior Analytics*, the great Aristotelian Commentator Ibn Rushd defines "knowledge" (scientific knowledge, *epistemē*, *'ilm*) as one of Aristotle's five intellectual virtues and the faculty of reason, akin to the other virtues, in an Aristotelian way. Ibn Rushd defends the teleological argument, rooted in Aristotle's teleological reading of nature, and supports the modal strong epistemic status of this argument, which is part of the concept of knowledge, in his early work (*Short Commentary on Metaphysics*), middle period work (*al-Kashf*) and late work (*Long Commentary on Metaphysics*), all in harmony with each other. Ibn Rushd, constructing the teleological argument based on the definition of knowledge, which fundamentally articulates the necessary or essential qualities inherent in objects in defense of de re modality, takes a step that seems quite radical within the context of the Aristotelian epistemic tradition to which he is affiliated: The teleological argument, strongly associated with the concept of knowledge—one of the five intellectual virtues—is presented as a form of deductive inference accessible not only to philosophers but also to ordinary public. In other words, according to him, the argument is both a *philosophical and a religious way*. This implies, for instance, that natural theology, typically viewed by Aquinas as an activity reserved for the higher epistemic class with talent and leisure, is seen by Ibn Rushd as a robust epistemic activity accessible to ordinary people. This new element, which can be referred to as common sense natural theology, contends that ordinary public knowledge and philosophers' knowledge differ in details, such as whether it is a simple or complex deductive inference, while remaining the same in terms of their *knowledge* status.

Keywords: teleological argument; knowledge; Aristotle; de re modality; necessity; virtue epistemology; teleologically the best of all possible worlds

1. Introduction

Ibn Rushd is a philosopher who defends one of the epistemically strongest teleological arguments in the history of philosophy. According to him, this argument is both related to Aristotle's teleological reading of the nature of philosophy and is the only way of expressing knowledge that Islam, one of the theistic religions, offers to the public regarding faith in the existence of God. Furthermore, Ibn Rushd contends that it represents even the best of arguments among various arguments.

His strong endorsement of utilizing mathematical and experimental astronomy to provide data for the teleological argument in metaphysical science increases its similarities to the contemporary fine-tuning argument. Not only the somewhat anthropic element but also the need for empirical scientific data are among the strong parallels between the two arguments.

Ibn Rushd's teleological reading of the universe has many foundations, likely rooted in the Aristotelian view of the universe. According to Ibn Rushd, the universe is a work of art (al-maṣnū') produced by the Maker, that is, God (al-Ṣāni'). In this context, the critical question, whose ontological and epistemological implications I address in this paper, is as follows: If something is truly a work of art, can it be other than it is?

Ibn Rushd's expression of the teleological argument as a deductive inference accessible to ordinary people, in terms of "knowledge", one of the intellectual virtues, seems remarkably compatible with the contemporary virtue epistemology of Ernest Sosa. This epistemological perspective aligns with the notion of common sense. Contemporary virtue epistemology also accepts deductive reason as an intellectual virtue that offers reflective knowledge. Experimental science, an integral component of contemporary virtue epistemology, seems to be evident in Ibn Rushd's orientation toward mathematical and experimental astronomy within the context of the subjects of the teleological argument.

Even though "scientific knowledge", which the Commentator lists among the five intellectual virtues like Aristotle, is not included in the catalog of contemporary Sosa's virtue epistemology, the difference in content should not obscure us from recognizing the structural resemblance between the two virtue epistemologies. In both frameworks, S's true belief constitutes knowledge only if it is based on intellectual virtue (For Sosa's virtue epistemology, see (Sosa 1995, 2007, 2011; Batak 2017)).

In this context, Ibn Rushd's surprising maneuver is a metaphysical shift that enables the robust epistemic status of the teleological argument: Unlike his predecessors, Ibn Rushd, who denies that the universe is a contingent being, expresses it and the individual objects within it as things shaped according to the First Agent, primarily with the modality of de re necessity. In his opinion, this results in the universe being "teleologically the best of all possible worlds".

In line with my title, I examine this argument from a more epistemic/metaphysical modality perspective. My aim in this paper is to construct a *coherent and holistic picture or understanding* of Ibn Rushd's teleological argument by delving into his dialectical works, demonstrative metaphysical works, and epistemological works. As I express in the relevant places, my views arrived at by this method seem almost entirely in conflict with those of H. Davidson and T. Kukkonen. In line with this methodology, I justify many ideas in my paper, including the assertion that the depicted picture aligns with common-sense natural theology, is an outcome of virtue epistemology, contributes to the defense of the teleologically best of all possible worlds, and is a product of de re necessity. Now, let us briefly look at the assumptions of Aristotelian metaphysics that form the basis of this argument.

2. Metaphysical Investigation Leading to Knowledge as the Investigation of the First Form, the First End, and the First Agent

The first objection that a careful reader of Ibn Rushd will immediately raise is this: According to Ibn Rushd, physical science, not metaphysical science, proves *the existence of God*, or more precisely, the unmoving Prime Mover. This is because, in addition to his seemingly clear statements, in Ibn Rushd's philosophy, it is said that physical science proves the existence of God.[1]

However, by examining the issue under this heading, it appears that I may have overlooked an issue that has lost its significance in terms of modern philosophy. With this title, I am asserting that his teleological argument is discussed within the realm of metaphysics. Does this seemingly complex situation harm the epistemic status of the argument from providence and argument from invention, that is, the teleological argument, which I have demonstrated here with the clear expressions of Ibn Rushd, as knowledge? Due to space constraints, I intend to explore the subject by focusing on the foundation of Ibn Rushd's teleological argument, especially from an epistemic perspective.

According to Ibn Rushd's thought, crucial for addressing the aforementioned problem, *knowledge ('ilm*) is attained when we know *('arafnā*) the causes (Ibn Rushd 1990?) and philosophy is the knowledge of causes; therefore, "every science *('ilm*) includes *the knowledge* (*ma'rifa*) of causes" (Ibn Rushd 1990?). In accordance with this basic Aristotelian epistemic principle, we must include the four causes within the confines of our space, guiding us toward knowledge within the framework of our topic.

The teleological argument seems directly related to three of the four causes: to know the First Agent, the First End, and ultimately, the First Form allows us to know the order of the world. This is because the First Principle is the organizing force behind the world.

First of all, we must examine the end cause, which is the superior cause, and its close relationship with the efficient or agent (*fā'il*) cause. In the conclusion propositions, the reference to God as the agent cause is of critical importance for Ibn Rushd's teleological argument. I would like to emphasize that in both parts of his teleological argument, the agent cause is incorporated into the conclusion proposition.

According to Ibn Rushd, Aristotle's primary aim in metaphysical science is to provide knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of distant or ultimate (*akṣā*) causes in the forms of the formal, the end, and the agent causes related to sensible things. As I quote from Ibn Rushd below, according to him, every agent is a mover, but not every mover is an agent. As one of the primary aims of metaphysics, the end cause, more than giving movement, gives the form with which movement emerges. Therefore, in metaphysics, which examines being qua being, agency is not related to objects that change qua change (Ibn Rushd 1958, pp. 3–4). In the second part of metaphysics, separate things and their relation to the First Principle, which is God and His attributes and acts, and the fact that this First Principle is the Distant/Ultimate Perfection, the First Form, and the First Agent are examined (Ibn Rushd 1958). This fact demonstrates that the teleological argument, in which agent causation is used in the conclusion proposition, is not a physical proof of the existence of God but a metaphysical demonstrative proof. For, as clearly stated, the examination of the agent cause is an examination of metaphysics.

Highlighting the disparity between the two sciences from an epistemic standpoint appears significantly more crucial in the context of the topic addressed in my paper. In other words, the difference between the two inquiries is as follows: while metaphysics achieves *the knowledge* (*ma'rifa*) of the First Form and Final End of all beings, natural science attains *the knowledge* (*ma'rifa*) of the first matter, natural form, and the First Mover (Ibn Rushd 1983, pp. 759–60). Thus, metaphysics is oriented toward gaining the knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of the First Form and the First End ((Ibn Rushd 1990, p. 1467; 1986, p. 95). For an extended discussion, see Peter Adamson, who seems to have reached a similar conclusion to mine, cf. "...physics and metaphysics are approaching one and the same cause from two different perspectives", p. 214; also see pp. 200, 209. (Adamson 2019)).

The *specific* study of metaphysics, then, is the study of the First Agent, the First Form, and the First End. Even more importantly, in the sense of being an inferential source of information, "The word that conveys this meaning is demonstrative (*burhāniyyūn*)". ((Ibn Rushd 1990?); For the definition and conditions of demonstration, see (Fakhry 2008) p. 35 ff).

> ...for he [metaphysician] *knows* [*ya'rifa*] that the moving principle the *existence* of which has been demonstrated in natural philosophy is the principle of the sensible substance as form and end (Ibn Rushd 1990, p. 1433; 1986, p. 79). (Italics are not found in the text.)

My conclusion, for which I am unable to provide additional textual evidence due to space constraints, is as follows: Physical science proves the existence of the First Mover, while metaphysical science proves the existence of the First End, First Form, and First Agent. Accordingly, it seems completely compatible to say that the qualities of the being, which is unique as a substrate, are proven by different philosophical disciplines in a way that provides "knowledge". We can now begin a teleological argument that uses these basic concepts from the metaphysics of causality.

3. Aristotle and Ibn Rushd: Defenders of the Teleological Argument in Metaphysical Sciences

3.1. As Metaphysical Knowledge Providence and the Argument from Providence

Although it is beyond the scope of this article to examine Aristotle's philosophy, it may be appropriate to begin by stating that the concept of teleology is a central theme

of his philosophy. Accordingly, the regular motion of something or its functioning in a well-formed way requires an explanation outside of itself. A recent study that focuses solely on this concept in his philosophy expresses this encompassing fact as follows:

> Aristotle thinks that the fact that things function well in nature needs a general explanation. . .His teleological explanations in the works on nature make reference to the good of specific kinds of things—stars, elements, plants, animals, humans, families, and cities—and not just to human beings, god, or some other overarching cosmic good. (Johnson 2005, p. 11)

Ibn Rushd appears to be faithful to this Aristotelian teleological program in his philosophy. However, to understand this harmony, we must begin with a methodological problem. Ibn Rushd contends that philosophical truths, or interpretations, should be incorporated into demonstrative/philosophical books, ensuring that those outside the community of philosophers cannot easily access them (Averroes 1976, pp. 60–61). What does a methodology applied in this way constitute, and what is its scope? Given that *al-Kashf* is considered among Ibn Rushd's dialectical or rhetorical works, does the argument from providence, also presented in this book as a teleological argument, get forsaken in his demonstrative ("philosophical") works? For instance, is it supplanted in favor of the First Mover argument as a cosmological argument, which he considers to be located in natural science? I think that the last of the great commentaries (written in 1192 and 1194), which reflects his final or mature ideas in metaphysics, will provide us with a solid understanding of this subject. Just as the Commentator includes his explanations that God's knowledge is neither universal nor particular in both his dialectical works (*Kashf*, *Faṣl*) and his demonstrative works (*LCM*), there is a continuity and harmony between these two different types of works regarding the teleological argument.

As presented textual support in the previous section, Ibn Rushd asserted that the investigations of the end, the form, and the agent cause in metaphysics were added to the moving cause in natural science. Unlike natural science, in metaphysics, God is restated as the end cause or the First End and the First Agent, with the concepts of providence and invention (creation) being two parts of the teleological argument. The fact that *Kashf*'s argument from providence and argument from invention, expressing *knowledge*, continues with very strong philosophical analyses in LCM and is detailed with Aristotelian *metaphysical knowledge* is very important, as it shows that the status of "knowledge" as an intellectual virtue has not fundamentally changed. It is one thing to determine whether this content constitutes a theistic argument—that is, the task of proving *the existence of God*, or more accurately, the existence of God as the First Mover, which falls under natural philosophy rather than first philosophy. It is another matter entirely to discuss the demonstrations of the first philosophy concerning the First End, the First Form, and the First Agent. As demonstrated numerous times above, the analysis of the First End, the First Form, and the First Agent resulting from the first philosophical investigation was termed knowledge by him.

According to what Ibn Rushd states in LCM, Aristotle also defends the argument from providence:

> It must be known to you that this is Aristotle's view concerning providence (*al-ʿinaya*), and that the problems arising about providence are solved by (his view). (Ibn Rushd 1990, p. 1715; 1986, p. 200)

According to this view, the analogy presented regarding teleological elements such as good and excellent in the universe is as follows:

> For in the army, the good is that which exists because of the leader of the army and because of the order existing in it (the army). The good which is in the leader of the army is much better than the good which is in the order of the army, for the order exists because of the leader of the army, and the leader of the army does not exist because of the order which is in the army, since the leader of the army

> is the cause of the order and the order is not the cause of the leader. (Ibn Rushd 1990, p. 1711; 1986, p. 199)

If we apply this teleological analogy to the universe (the army) and God (the commander), we arrive at the First End or the Final End: "[Since] the good is present in this universe in both ways together, i.e., through the order and through the thing because of which there is order and which is the first principle. . ." (Ibn Rushd 1990, p. 1712; 1986, p. 199).

While perfect order exists in celestial bodies, the absence of order in the sublunar world is accidental (Ibn Rushd 1990, p.1712; 1986, p. 199). Therefore, there is order at different levels in the universe we live in, but there is no complete absence of order (Ibn Rushd 1990, p. 1713; 1986, p. 200). Ibn Rushd sees the fact that everything in the universe is ordered according to a "single" thing as a function of divine causality (which is, of course, the function of the First End):

> For it appears that what is common to all of them is that they all exist because of one thing, and that their actions tend towards this one which is the first cause because of which the world exists, just as everything which is in the house, as is well known, exists because of the master of the house. (Ibn Rushd 1990, p. 1713; 1986, p. 200)

The fact that there is accidentally less order in things that have matter in their structure is not due to the creator/the agent (*fā'il*) but rather as a metaphysical evil because matter is flawed, and this does not eliminate divine providence. According to him, *the Aristotelian middle view* of Ibn Rushd that I have presented so far rejects both radical approaches to divine providence: (a) the strong providence approach: God has provided providence for everything and does not do evil (*ve lā an yaf'ale sharran*); (b) the weak providence approach: since the world contains evils, there is no divine providence in it (Ibn Rushd 1990, pp. 1713, 1715; 1986, pp. 200–1).

After observing that Ibn Rushd and Aristotle, in the science of metaphysics, advocate a metaphysical order as a primary teleological element through three causes, we need to delve deeper into the epistemic and modal structure of this argument.

3.2. Teleological Argument, "Knowledge" as One of the Intellectual Virtues, and the Metaphysics of De Re Necessity

As Ibn Rushd touched upon, according to Ibn Sina's argument from contingency, also adopted by al-Juwayni, the world is possible or contingent (*jāiz or mūmkin*) (Ibn Rushd 1998, pp. 111–12, 113; Averroes 2005, pp. 27, 29). However, as presented later in this section, Ibn Rushd, in the LCM, attributes the necessary modality to the universe. It seems quite easy to notice that there is a contrast between the argument from providence and the argument in question in terms of de re modal qualifications. However, seeing that there is a complete contrast between the two arguments in terms of the three teleological properties of the universe or its elements that determine this modality—namely (a) shape, (b) location, (c) measure, etc.—provides a unique opportunity to deeply understand Ibn Rushd's argument from providence. The problem in question here is whether it is possible for the universe or the animate or inanimate parts within it to be in a situation other than the one in which it is. The positive answer to this question, according to Ibn Rushd, is the rejection of the teleological order in the universe for which the First Agent is responsible. These modal qualifications seem to have an essential connection with the understanding of the concept of knowledge.

The definition of "knowledge" or scientific knowledge (*'ilm*, *epistemē*), which Ibn Rushd accepts as one of the five intellectual virtues in line with Aristotle, holds particular significance. In fact, this virtue is a faculty (*quwwa*) of reason (Ibn Rushd 1984, p. 117), contributing significantly to the epistemic status of the teleological argument. As we observe, in addition to repeatedly defining this argument with robust terms such as "knowledge", "conclusively know", and "demonstration", Ibn Rushd also repeatedly expresses it with the modality of "necessity", which is the strongest modal concept, in the concluding proposition and explanations of the argument. Therefore, we must closely examine these modal

qualities of the order that being exhibits. This idea of strict order exhibited by objects reminds us of the Averroes' definition of knowledge, which includes *the concept of necessity* (*ḍarūriyya*), meaning that it is *impossible* for something to be other than what it is. This is also reflected in the following definition of knowledge: "It is the belief that it is *impossible* for something that exists to be anything other than what it is". Thus, the subject of knowledge is a necessary existence, and it is related to a universal nature (Ibn Rushd 1984, p. 115). We see that the connection between knowledge and necessity is preserved here[2] and that Ibn Rushd constructs the argument using the concepts of "more perfect and better" as well as the concept of necessity.

Ibn Rushd's definition of knowledge above seems to express a factual state of affairs or the case that "cannot possibly be otherwise". When a fact in the world causes a belief in that fact through an intellectual virtue, S's belief about that fact becomes knowledge. Here, the non-normative factual property of something that is relevant to knowledge is 'the impossibility of it being otherwise than it is.' Belief about this natural property is called knowledge because it is based on intellectual virtue or psychological processes. In this case, for example, a teleological argument proposition is called knowledge if it corresponds to the natural property in question. This definition seems to accept the correspondence theory of truth. The definition, especially its inferential counterpart, reveals a factual propositional conception of knowledge that is subject to teleological argument.

Since Ibn Rushd describes the teleological argument as a demonstrative (*al-burhān*) argument, as we see in the following pages, it would be appropriate to briefly examine the definition of this type of inferential knowledge and its basis, such as the "necessity" property, in addition to the definition of knowledge. Demonstrative knowledge, which is a deductive conclusive inference at the highest level, consists of necessary premises, that is, essential and universal premises that are never contrary to what is known. Therefore, the premises and the conclusion of this inference are together necessary, immutable, universal, and essential. Of course, it is unthinkable that the premises of such high-level epistemic knowledge are not true. In such an Aristotelian foundationalist epistemology, this inference is based on a priori (*awwalī*) foundations. While Ibn Rushd explains demonstrative knowledge, he states, "One who does not know that something is necessary with something that it is necessary does not know that it is necessary". This is because, according to him, if something is necessary, its cause is also necessary. What gives the status of being demonstrative to the teleological argument, which seems to have a posteriori content about the universe, is that, for example, there is no demonstration for particular things, such as a lunar eclipse, in terms of their being particular. However, on the same subject, there may be a demonstration of a *necessary universal nature*, such as *all* lunar eclipses (Ibn Rushd 1984, pp. 62–67). Therefore, even though knowledge and non-knowledge opinions (*ẓan*) are on the "same subject", they have completely different epistemic values. Although this inference, of course, also explains a singular event with its necessary modality, for example, in every singular lunar eclipse, it is based on necessary causes that exist in every time and place. Thus, any singular event, such as a lunar eclipse, meets the definition of knowledge with the modality of something that *cannot be possible* to occur contrary to what is believed.

It can, therefore, be grasped that *knowledge* is defined in terms of *the concept of necessity*. The metaphysical implications of the overlap of these two epistemic/metaphysical concepts are extremely important for the teleological argument. The concept of necessity is the most basic concept for knowledge in general and for demonstration, which is inferential knowledge. According to Ibn Rushd, *foundational necessity in metaphysics*, which is the most famous and from which other meanings of necessity derive, is defined as follows: "Something that cannot possibly be otherwise is called necessary existence (*mavjūd ḍarūri*)". According to Ibn Rushd's statement in LCM, the necessary being is divided into two: 1. absolutely necessary (*al-ḍarūri al-muṭlaq*): The being that *cannot possibly be otherwise* in terms of its *essence*, which is God. 2. It is a necessary being that *cannot possibly be otherwise* in terms of anyone else, which is *the universe*, and it receives this property in terms of God, its First Cause (Ibn Rushd 1983, pp. 519, 521). As we see later in my paper, Ibn Rushd tries to

justify his teleological argument by explicitly arguing that objects in the world (rather in terms of their form as a simple entity) have a (mostly) *necessary order* relative to the First Agent or the First End, as part of the investigation in the science of metaphysics. We see that his attribution of the necessary property to the universe (for example, not contingent as Ibn Sīnā advocates) has very strong implications not only for the "knowability" of the universe but also for the "teleological order" it exhibits. So, here we have a ground where epistemology and metaphysics overlap in a strong sense.

If an entity is something impossible to be in a situation other than what it is, that entity is necessary, and the teleological reflection of this ontological property is the subject of my paper. This reflection is meticulously explored by Ibn Rushd, particularly with three teleological variables, as I show in the following pages. Thus, Ibn Rushd is actually concerned with the *teleological modality* in the teleological argument. Ibn Rushd states, just before the definition of knowledge that I gave at the beginning of this section, that it is *impossible* to have "knowledge" about "beings that are possible to be different from what they are", other than necessary things, but that it is possible to have a correct opinion (*ẓan*). At the juncture we have reached, it becomes evident that Ibn Rushd's knowledge and correct opinion are de re *belief* based on the properties of existence. However, it is important to note that opinion is not considered an intellectual virtue.

With this structure, his definition of knowledge seems to exhibit a radical reliabilist quality. Accordingly, S knows that P (or, rather, if any, S is justified in believing p) if and only if it is produced by a cognitive process that *always* reliably yields truth. P, which constitutes knowledge or justified belief in Ibn Rushd, is always true, not merely mostly, due to its necessary modality. In this case, reason provides a kind of Cartesian infallible access to reality. Thus, the modal concepts employed by Ibn Rushd in the teleological argument, whose formal structure I delineate below, are de re modalities. Ibn Rushd goes beyond the main tendency in contemporary analytic philosophy and defends a very strong (teleological) de re modality. According to this strong de re modality view, objects in the world *mostly* possess essential properties and necessarily fewer accidental properties.

The fact that demonstrative propositions express necessity, then, implies that the concept of necessity given in his definition of knowledge finds its counterpart in the highest level of inferential knowledge. If knowledge analysis were to be made, it would be clearly seen that this concept is basically grounded in necessary and universal properties, meeting two key elements of "traditional" knowledge analysis: belief and truth. If we accept the third element, justification, as "epistemic reasons or evidence", then necessary (external) causes or universal nature—when we know (*'arafnā*) the causes we attain *knowledge ('ilm*) or the necessary middle term—may represent the semantic equivalent of this concept. Alternatively, a more direct answer—dispensing with the need for a third element—would be that S's true belief in P regarding the natural property constitutes knowledge if and only if P is based on one of the intellectual virtues (such as knowledge, *'ilm*). Alternatively, the normative attributes of a true belief, like being evident (as Roderic Chisholm suggests) and certain (*yaqīn*), can be considered as concepts that express a normative epistemic concept such as justification. The third element, which may differentiate this conception of knowledge from the contemporary conception of knowledge, not only transforms true belief into knowledge but also seems to elevate it to a foundationalist epistemic status, rendering it *infallible* (that is, something that cannot possibly be otherwise).

In this paper, while presenting the premises of the teleological argument, their basis, and explanation, I draw particular attention to the fact that Ibn Rushd constantly and coherently employs the de re modal concept of "necessity" or its definition (impossible to be otherwise). I characterize such necessity and its counterpart as Averroes' theory of the best possible world with the concept of teleology: teleologically necessary, the best of all teleologically possible worlds.

So far, I have discussed the fundamental information, metaphysical, and epistemological foundations of the teleological argument. Now, we should proceed to examine the content of this argument within the discipline of metaphysics.

3.3. More Metaphysical Explanations and Teleological Modalities of the Argument from Providence

The above content in the LCM is also found in much more detail in Ibn Rushd's early work, *Short Commentary on Metaphysics*, which he partially revised in his late period. According to Ibn Rushd, the actions arising from the movements of the heavenly bodies, which possess souls, support each being in the world. If *one* of their movements were eliminated, the order of beings would be disrupted. The distances of the moon and planets from the sun, as well as their speeds, are expressed through *mathematical or experimental astronomy*. If we remove even one of the movements of these objects, the order will be disrupted. Therefore, it is not *possible* (*laysa yumkinu*) for their actions to be coincidental. In the concluding proposition of this reasoning, he employs the modal concept that is a fundamental part of the definition of knowledge discussed above: This fact shows that the celestial bodies *necessarily* (*ḍarūra*) act according to a *common purpose*. Interestingly, Ibn Rushd does something he rarely does within a technical demonstration or philosophy book on this subject: he makes a reference to a frequently cited verse about the order in the universe, which he also included in his dialectical work *Kashf*. He offers the same verse in *Kashf* in the context of order and the unity of God ("had there been in heaven or on earth any deities other than God, both [those realms] would surely have fallen into ruin!" (Qur'an 21. Al-Anbiyā-22. Translated by M. Asad)). According to him, this common purpose makes the world "one" with the First Principle, which cannot be incidental or accidental, and the providence it causes is quite obvious (Ibn Rushd 1958, pp. 140–41).

While defending the argument from providence in *Kashf*, which he wrote in the period 1179–1181, Ibn Rushd employs the term suitability (*muwāfaqa*), which is one of the basic concepts he used in the premise here as well, that is, in the SCM he wrote in 1161. Accordingly, the suitability of the movements of celestial bodies supports and protects the existence of beings on Earth. For example, if the *sun's suitability* (in terms of teleological variables such as size, closeness, and current location) were not an issue, plant and animal species would go extinct due to extreme heat or cold. The seasons formed by the inclination of the sun's orbit clearly reveal (*zuhūran bayyinan*) the existence of providence in this regard. The providence in the daily movements of the sun is also obvious; if this did not happen, day and night would not exist in the current order, and the species would disappear. In that case, the survival of living things on earth is, by modal qualification, *necessarily* intended, and it is *not possible* for the agent of this to be coincidence. Ibn Rushd explains the providence of the moon in a similar way (Ibn Rushd 1958, p. 160).

Consistent with SCM, in *Kashf*, Ibn Rushd touches on the same things in terms of meaning regarding celestial bodies. For example, it refers to the order in the movements of the heavenly bodies, which is caused by God and *preserves the existence of humans and other living and nonliving entities.* (Hereinafter, I refer to the teleological arguments constructed according to these concepts as RP1 and RP2.) According to him, the order in the movements of these objects and their effects on the beings on earth exhibit a strict order. For example, if one of the variables on which this order is based, which I called three teleological variables throughout my paper, were eliminated, such as if these bodies were in a different position with different quantities and speeds, the existence of humans, other living beings and natural phenomena like rain and water, which are necessary in their lives, would obviously disappear (Ibn Rushd 1998, p. 191; Averroes 2005, pp. 111–12).

Does the fact that we do not notice most of the effects resulting from the movements of celestial bodies with our senses harm the epistemic status of the argument from providence? For example, as we see below in the upcoming convention section, which is another element of the teleological argument, it is easy to recognize the strong influence that led Aristotle (and, of course, Ibn Rushd) to state, "Man begets a man like himself and the sun". However, the influence of these celestial bodies on the seasons may not be immediately apparent. In his response, Ibn Rushd states in SCM that we know with "absolute certainty" (*qata'an yaqīnan*) that these influences serve the providence of the world. How is this very high epistemic status achieved? He reiterates that the "experimental science of astronomy" should be consulted in this matter, given the need for an experience that a human lifetime

will not be enough to acquire (Ibn Rushd 1958, p. 162). Moreover, it is the science of metaphysics, the study of the First Agent and the First End, which fundamentally bestows this high status.

What is the metaphysical basis of the providence of heavenly bodies to the world? There is a similar order in other planets other than the sun and moon. Ibn Rushd states that this situation is due to, in *Aristotle's words*, their imitation of the sun and their desire to resemble it (Ibn Rushd 1958, p. 161). According to Ibn Rushd, they took the order in their movements from their own principles, and these principles were taken from God, the First Principle. This shows that *the first providence* is God's providence, which is the reason for life on earth (Ibn Rushd 1958, p. 162).

The Great Commentator's acceptance of faculties as a tool to compensate for the natural evils in the world, aligning with a defender of virtue epistemology, can be read as a pragmatic theodicy against natural evils, suggesting that human competence can also be the subject of theodicy: As in *Kashf* and LCM, Ibn Rushd asserts in SCM that pure goodness in the world emerges with God's "will and intention" and that evils such as corruption (*fasād*) and old age arise not from God but from the imperfect structure of matter. For instance, it is an accident that fire, whose benefits are obvious, corrupts plants and living things. However, creatures endowed with the sense of touch have been given features that will protect them from this accidental evil. Thus, many living beings have been endowed with characteristics essential for preserving their existence. If these were not granted, it would *not be possible* for these beings to exist. Ibn Rushd extensively defends this idea in detail in *Kashf*. For example, senses and imaginative abilities in living things are (mostly) provided for security and protection purposes. The most prominent example of this is the competence of reason in humans to provide providence to beings on earth by giving them features that will enable them to continue their existence. This is because, according to the Commentator, it is *not possible* for humans to exist without reason. Therefore, divine providence bestows two graces upon all beings: (a) grating their existence and (b) providing properties that protect against factors that would corrupt their existence (Ibn Rushd 1958, pp. 136, 162–63).

It seems that Ibn Rushd articulates the argument from providence, outlined above, following his own *definition of knowledge* based on strong modality. Now, in light of this definition of knowledge, and according to Ibn Rushd's own expression, according to the theory of demonstration specific to philosophers in metaphysics, I formulate the argument from providence in the form of a *complicated syllogism* as follows:

Metaphysical argument from providence, MP: (dalil al-'inaya)

I If (teleological) variables such as the size, location, proximity, and current inclination of the sun were different, living things on Earth would disappear.

II If these (teleological) variables were different from their current situation, destructive cold or extreme heat would occur for living things, or the four seasons that are *necessary* for living things would not occur.

III This suitability (*muwāfaqa*) and providence regarding the existence of beings on earth and the preservation of species is similarly seen in the movements of the moon and other celestial bodies (based on also the mathematical/experimental science of astronomy).

IV Therefore, the suitability for the living things on earth provided by the unity of order of these bodies is *necessarily* intended, and it is teleologically *impossible* for the agency to be a coincidence.

V Therefore, soulful celestial bodies *necessarily* [which would be impossible in any other case] act towards a *common purpose*.

VI The celestial bodies want to resemble and imitate the Final End, just as the lover tries to resemble his beloved.

VII Therefore, we know with *absolute certainty* (*qata'an yaqīnan*) that the influences caused by the heavenly bodies, which protect and support *every* living being on earth, indicate a divine providence based on the First Principle.

(a) Divine providence is both the granting of our existence and the granting of psychological or epistemic properties that will protect our existence.
(b) For example, it would *not be possible* for humans to survive if they were not given the sense of touch, the senses in general, the faculty of imagination, and, more clearly, the reason.
(c) Natural evils in the world, such as corruption and old age, do not come from God but from matter as a metaphysical evil.

3.4. The Argument from Creation as Metaphysical Knowledge

Now let's start with the second version of the teleological argument in metaphysics, namely the argument from creation/invention. God's role as a creator is often seen as an attribute specific to theistic religions. However, Ibn Rushd's theistic philosophical system introduces a concept of creation that he took from Aristotle and is completely different from the standard theological view of creation ex nihilo. Like the concept of providence in the previous section, the concept of creation here is defined according to Aristotle's concept of efficient or agent (*fā'il*) cause. Thus, the agent cause and the First Agent, which act according to their form, as understood through the science of metaphysics, play a dominant role in both parts of the teleological argument.

According to Ibn Rushd's definition in LCM, which he calls *the middle view*, the agent (*fā'il*) is not the one who creates from nothing or the being from which the world emanates but the one who actualizes potentiality (Ibn Rushd 1990, p. 1652; 1986, p. 174). According to Ibn Rushd, as we saw in the previous section, *Aristotle* defends the argument of creation as well as the argument of providence. Ibn Rushd acknowledges that "we have borrowed from Aristotle" for this doctrine of agency (Ibn Rushd 1990, p. 1499; 1986, p. 109). According to him, Aristotle's view of creation or agent (*fā'il*) cause and generation is the least doubtful, corresponds most closely to being, overlaps with it the most, and is the most distant from contradictions. Therefore, he intends to elucidate the subject based on the premises and principles of this view (Ibn Rushd 1990, p. 1497; 1986, p. 108).

How does the agent perform the act of actualizing the potential? According to Ibn Rushd, "The agent produces only the compound from matter and form by moving matter and changing it to educe the potentiality it has for the form into actuality". (Ibn Rushd 1990, p.1499; 1986, p.109). In this view, the agent does not combine two different things. It does not actualize something from outside, but rather the form that already exists inherently in matter. Can this agent (*fā'il*) be referred to as the creator (*al-ikhtira'*), or is it similar to the creator? (a) Yes, in the sense that it actualizes what potentially already exists; (b) no, in the sense that it does not actualize the form from what is non-form (Ibn Rushd 1990, p. 1499; 1986, p. 109). The answer in LCM avoids conceptual confusion. Ibn Rushd also employs the common word (*al-khālık*), which is used to express the concept of creation, in the sense of expressing the above concept (*al-ikhtira'*): "Because the meaning of creation (*al-khālık*) is the invent of substances (*al-mukhtera'u*)" (Ibn Rushd 1998, p. 193). Then, Ibn Rushd not only uses the concept of invention (*al-Ikhtira'*) in the argument from invention (*Dalil al-Ikhtira'*) as synonymous with the concept of agent cause in a) above, he also uses it (invention, *al-Ikhtira'*) synonymously with the more common concept of creation (*al-khālik*). Accordingly, I maintain this synonymous use throughout my paper.

Aristotle (and, of course, Ibn Rushd) rejects the second meaning (b) of creation (*al-ikhtira'*), and in *Kashf*, which is in the class of his dialectical work, he rejects this theologian meaning with reference to religious texts. In this rejection, both philosophers rely on an important epistemic or logical principle. If the agent creates the form, "something would come into being from non-being. This is why he thinks that the form is not subject to generation and corruption, except by accident, I mean by the generation and corruption of the compound". (Ibn Rushd 1990, p. 1503; 1986, p. 111). For example, while individual humans are subject to generation and corruption, the human form is not. According to Ibn Rushd, however, the theologians of the three major theistic religions, who advocate the view that forms are created, of course, rejected the principle on which Aristotle was based

on this issue. For example, about Muslim theologians, he says, "since the theologians of our religion believe that the agent (*fā'il*) acts only by creation (*al-ıkhtira'*) and production from nothing (*al-ibda'*)" (Ibn Rushd 1990, p. 1503; 1986, p. 111). However, it is one of the a priori principles (*al-ewāil*) that it is *impossible* for an entity to come into existence from nothing (Ibn Rushd 1990?).

There is a very clear explanation for the realization of the agency of actualizing what potentially exists and, therefore, of creation. The second quote below explains the suitability of the sun for living things on Earth and, therefore, its providence, in the argument from providence that we examined in the previous section.

> In that respect, substance behaves like all the accidents. The hot does not impart heat from outside to the body which becomes hot, but the potentially hot becomes actually hot. . ."That which begets the soul" does not mean that it implants a soul in matter but simply that it actualizes what was potentially a soul. (Ibn Rushd 1990, p. 1500; 1986, p. 110)

> This is why Aristotle says that man begets a man like himself and the sun. The seeds are generated in earth and water by solar heat mixed with the heat of the other stars. Therefore, it is the sun and the other stars which are *principle* (mebdeu) *of life* for *every natural living being*. . .[3]. (Ibn Rushd 1990, pp. 1501–2; 1986, p. 111)

If the sun and other stars are the cause of every living being in nature, for example, is there a measure or order in their temperature actions?

> Accordingly, one must understand that nature, when it performs an action *very highly organized* without itself being intelligent, is inspired by active (*fā'ila*) powers which are nobler than it and are called "intellect". These proportions and powers resulting in the elements from the motions of the sun and of the other stars. . .[4]. (Ibn Rushd 1990, p. 1502; 1986, p. 111)

I think this point we have reached is very important in terms of the intertwining of argument from providence and creation. Here, the agency of the "reason" implies its creation in an orderly manner.

In this context, the reason why Ibn Rushd defines efficient (*al-muḥarrik*) or mover cause or agent (*fā'il*) cause[5] as the final cause becomes clear. Thus, God acts as a final cause. This is because, as I explored in the previous section, heavenly bodies have a desire for God, who serves as the ultimate End for them (Ibn Rushd 1958, p. 137):

> The first mover imparts motion, without being moved, to the first object moved by it, just as the beloved moves his lover without being moved itself, and it imparts motion to what is below its first moved *by means of* the first moved[6]. . . The first heaven is moved by this mover by means of its desire for it, I mean because it imitates it according to its ability as the lover is moved to [imitate] the beloved" (Ibn Rushd 1990, p. 1606; 1986, p. 154) Having explained that the first mover is eternal, substance, pure actuality and free from matter, that it imparts motion without being moved but as object of desire and pleasure. . . (Ibn Rushd 1990, p. 1599; 1986, p. 151)

I think the general picture of a single substratum, which is not numerically three, emerges here. The First Agent or the First Mover, as the one who brings it from potential to action, is the First End in the sense that the movement towards it is directed, while it is the First Form in the sense that it is the substance in which all this takes place. The fact that the First Mover, whose *existence* is postulated from physical science, is the First Agent in metaphysics, which means being creative in the sense of bringing it from potential to action, is explained here by two principles: The agent does his act because of his own form and performs his act for a purpose, which in the case of God, who is an unmoved being, is His own essence. The First End is the Ultimate Perfection, towards which everything in motion moves with desire and strives to resemble.

I formulate this argument as follows, according to the views of Ibn Rushd, which I examined above.

Metaphysical argument from invention/creation, MC: (*dalil al-ikhtira'*):

I According to the a priori logical principle, it is *impossible* for an agent to create form from non-form, that is, from nothing.
II Therefore, agent cause is the entity that actualizes the potential that already exists inherently in matter.
III Creating, then, is the realization of agency.
IV A similar being and the sun give birth to humans and other living things.
V Therefore, the celestial bodies are the principle of the life of every living being through their actions.
VI The effects, such as temperature, that these celestial bodies convey to the earth are predestined by variables such as distance and proximity of each of them.
VII For this reason, when nature acts in a highly ordered manner without thought, it is inspired by the forces called "reason".
VIII All these actions are ultimately based on the action of the First Agent, which is to be the creator and to be the First End.

Ibn Rushd defended the teleological argument above within the discipline of metaphysics by attributing it to the status of "knowledge" through concepts like the First Agent, the First End, the First Cause, and the First Principle. Now, we should examine how these concepts of causality in the metaphysics of Aristotle and Ibn Rushd—especially the concept of the Agent or First Agent—are expanded with strong knowledge attributions to include the ordinary public or folk. Thus, we can likely conclude that there is a strong coherence within the framework of the teleological argument between Ibn Rushd's demonstrative works and his dialectical works, which is the primary aim of my paper.

4. The Ordinary People's and the Philosophers' Argument About the Existence of God Equally Express Knowledge or the Natural Theology of Common Sense

After strongly criticizing the cosmological argument (*ḥudūth*) of Muslim theologians on the grounds that it relies on a dialectical method that cannot produce *knowledge* and that it is not the *religious way* (*al-tarika al-shar'iyya*) universally calling all people to accept the existence of God, Ibn Rushd presents two teleological ways or arguments. Both of these arguments aim to provide *knowledge* on the subject and align with the religious call for acknowledging the existence of God:

1. The argument from providence (*dalil al-'inaya*) examines that humans and all beings were *created* for *providence* (thus, the argument from providence and creation appears intertwined).
2. The argument from creation or invention, (*dalil al-ikhtira'*) examines the creation of the substances of existing things.[7] This argument examines the creation of biological phenomena and intellectual virtues in inanimate objects, such as (a) life, (b) sense-perception, and (c) intellect (Ibn Rushd 1998, p. 118; Averroes 2005, p. 33).

However, to demonstrate the intertwinedness of these two arguments, Ibn Rushd, as you may recall, used these three elements in 1.3 while presenting the providence argument. Now, let us examine the formal structure, content, and epistemic nature of these two teleological arguments as presented by Ibn Rushd himself:

The argument from providence. (Dalil al-'Inaya. I name the argument as follows, based on Ibn Rushd's expression "religious way": **RP1**: religious argument from providence):

1. *All* existing beings on earth are *suitable* (*muwāfaqa*) to man's existence.
C. This suitability is *necessarily* (*ḍarūra*) due to an *Agent* (*fā'il*) both intending and willing.
   i. Since it is *not possible* (*laysa yumkinu*) for this suitability to be due to fortuitous chance. (Ibn Rushd 1998, p. 118; Averroes 2005, p. 33) Italics are not found in the original text.

Does this argument have an inductive inference? In other words, is the falsity of the conclusion compatible with the truth of the premise? In fact, *the necessary modality* in the conclusion proposition and the concepts I italicized in the proposition in its appendix, which is actually its meaning, directly answer this question. Let us adapt Ibn Rushd's definition of knowledge in his *Middle Commentary on Posterior Analytic*, which I discussed above in 3.2, to this argument: The fact that the beings and conditions on earth are suitable for human beings and other living things *necessarily* indicates the providence of God, the First Agent, in the sense that it is *impossible* for it to be in any other situation than it is, and it is *impossible* for the providence to arise by chance. Does Ibn Rushd explicitly state that this argument serves as a demonstration with a knowledge-producing function? I elaborate on this further below. Another point I would like to emphasize in the concluding proposition is related to the concept of agency, which I discussed at the beginning of my paper. It is crucial to note that in Ibn Rushd's framework, the concept of First Agent or agent cause is one of the concepts scrutinized by metaphysics, not physical sciences. Within this paradigm, first philosophy emerges as a philosophical discipline that provides the highest knowledge about the *first* principles.

What does Ibn Rushd understand by "suitability to human existence", which appears as a strong anthropocentric element in the first and only premise? According to him, the suitability and providence for human existence or life are evident in *certain* (*yaqīn*) ways —that is, in a way that expresses *knowledge*—in the following facts: night, day, sun, moon, seasons, earth, animals, plants, inanimate beings, rains, earth, water, air, and fire. In addition to this external teleology, there is also an internal teleology: a suitability and providence for life in human and animal organs. It may seem surprising that here, the strong pragmatic metaphysical element demonstrates God's knowledge and divine providence: A person who wants to obtain *complete knowledge* (*ma'rifa*) about God must investigate the *benefits* of all beings, the reason for creation, and the final cause (Ibn Rushd 1998, pp. 118–19; Averroes 2005, p. 33). Now, let us proceed to the second religious and philosophical way, as delineated by Ibn Rushd, representing the ways accessible to both ordinary people and philosophers.

The argument from invention/creation. (Dalil al-Ikhtira'. **RC:** religious argument from creation)

The second way that religion calls for in terms of leading all people to the existence of God, as presented by Ibn Rushd, is as follows: according to him, all people possess this argument potentially from creation:

1. Entities in the universe are invented/created (including all animals, plants, and sky).
C. For everything that is created, there is a creator.
   (a) For every existing entity, there is an agent (*fā'il*) who is its creator (Ibn Rushd 1998, p. 119; Averroes 2005, p. 34).

According to Ibn Rushd, starting from the case of the emergence of life in the case of animals and plants and inanimate objects, we *know conclusively* (*na'lamu qaṭ'an*) that the agent of this is God. We *know* (*na'lamu*) that the heavenly bodies, through their movements, are appointed for the providence and service of those on Earth. The fact that these bodies are subservient means that they were created *necessarily* (*ḍarūra*) (Ibn Rushd 1998, p. 119; Averroes 2005, p. 34). As can be seen, after using the expression "knowing" twice in a row, Ibn Rushd expresses the strong epistemic quality of this argument with the concept of "necessity", which is part of his definition of "knowledge", which is one of the five intellectual virtues, together with the argument from providence.

According to the first premise, beings in the universe are created (*mukhtari'a*). In deductive reasoning, as Ibn Rushd acknowledged, the premises must be known better than the conclusion. Moreover, where does this premise, which all humans are said to know from birth, derive its plausibility? Of course, from Aristotelian substance metaphysics. What shows that individual objects are created is that each of them is mentally compounded into matter and form. This is because, according to Ibn Rushd, every composite thing was

created or originated (Ibn Rushd 1990, p. 1620; 1986, p. 160). In the religious argument, the equivalent of the Aristotelian content illustrating creation is the body.

Just as reaching the idea of providence through the benefits of all existence in the first argument leads us to a complete knowledge of God, knowing the substance or its form also leads us to the same epistemic conclusion: "That is why it is incumbent on those who seek a true knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of God to know (*ya'rifa*) the essences (*jawāir*) of things, in order to understand the true meaning of invention [creation] in all existing entities" (Ibn Rushd 1998, p. 119; Averroes 2005, p. 34). According to the analysis of causes and agent causes in metaphysics in the previous section, this statement seems to be understood as follows: One who knows the form of objects or substances knows real creation. Since *the agent cause* is the one who makes the potential actual, and since the meaning of *creation* is nothing else than this, the one who knows the agent cause, and the formal cause *necessarily* knows the existence of the Creator First Agent.

One of the reasons why Ibn Rushd calls his teleological argument the religious way or argument is that the verses of the Qur'an, the primary source of religion, indicate the existence of the First Agent or the Almighty Artisan (*al-Ṣāni'*) through these two arguments, either separately or together. Since religion primarily appeals to ordinary people at their level, these two superior arguments alone are sufficient for them to believe. Immediately after presenting the above logical and epistemic content of the argument, he provides extensive examples from the verses in the Qur'an on this subject. The interesting thing is that in religion, the verses that point out the arguments leading to the existence of God are just these two types of arguments. These verses touch on natural phenomena that exist for the benefit of humans and other living beings, mentioning the providence of sleep, plants, sun, and rain. I must now delve into a more detailed discussion of the epistemic nature of the teleological argument I am presenting.

4.1. Epistemic Evaluation of the Teleological Argument as a Religious Common-Sense Argument: Simple Demonstration Expressing Knowledge

According to the preceding passage, the aforementioned two ways or arguments are considered "religious ways" in the sense that the indication of the existence of the Artisan in the religion, the Qur'an, is confined to these two arguments. So, does the teleological argument address only the general public, which means all epistemic communities except philosophers (i.e., theologians plus the ordinary public)? If it meets the philosophical conditions and, therefore, qualifies the way and argument of philosophers in terms of expressing knowledge—which we have explored in previous sections as the philosophers' way in metaphysical science—what are the differences between these two epistemic classes in terms of the argument? Ibn Rushd states that while the epistemic structure of these two forms of teleological argument is entirely similar between ordinary people and philosophers, they differ in the details:

> It has become clear from these arguments that the evidence for the existence of the Artisan is confined to these two types; namely, the argument from providence and the argument from invention. It has also become clear that these two ways correspond exactly to the way used by the select (meaning the philosophers), and that of the general public. Where *the two types of knowledge* (*al-ma'rifatayn*) differ is in *the details*; the general public is content, as far as knowing (*ma'rifa*) providence and invention is concerned, with what is *known* through *primary knowledge* (*al-ma'rifa al-ūlā*), which is derived from *sense-impressions*. The philosophers, however, *add* to what is known of existing things through sense-perception that which is known through demonstration by reference to providence and invention. Some philosophers have gone so far as to claim that the knowledge of the organs of human beings and animals they have achieved is close to thousands and thousands of times in *utility*. And if this is the case, then *this way is the religious and natural one*... (Ibn Rushd 1998, p. 122; Averroes 2005, pp. 37–38). (I have made some changes to the translation, and I have added italics.)

According to H. Davidson, who does not seem to have examined Ibn Rushd's teleological argument to the extent it deserves, the tone and subject matter of the argument in *Kashf*, where Ibn Rushd approves of the argument, are not scientific and philosophical. However, as we see in the passage here, Ibn Rushd repeatedly says that argument is both "the way of philosophers" and the way of ordinary people. According to Davidson, Ibn Rushd believes that the teleological argument is suitable for non-philosophers and that it contains "sufficient grains of truth" to meet their needs. According to him, the fact that Ibn Rushd recommends only the Aristotelian proof of motion in his technical works is evidence of his view. In line with this, he even claims that in Ibn Rushd, the philosophical formulation of the "scriptural teleological argument" is encompassed by the proof from motion. In other words, the teleological argument is a form of proof from motion (Davidson 1987, pp. 229–30).

Davidson's difference from Kukkonen, which I discuss a little later, is that he accepts the argument's "demonstrative character, although not fully adequate". These views conflict in many respects with the views I claim here. However, of course, I cannot list all my reasons here, as I present them throughout my paper. However, for a full list of my opposing arguments, see the next footnote. It is, however, a fundamental mistake that Davidson fails to consider both versions of the argument in SCM and LCM, which I discuss here, where Ibn Rushd repeatedly states that his teleological argument expresses knowledge with modal or epistemic qualifications. Again, in line with this, in my opinion, the teleological argument in *Kashf*, as an inquiry into providence, agent (*fā'il*) cause (which also means the creator [*al-ikhtira'*], the second element of the argument) and *First Agent*, is part of metaphysical science, not physical science, in a way that is compatible with SCM and LCM. In Ibn Rushd's opinion, repeatedly expressed, it is natural science that gives knowledge of the *existence of the First Mover*. I showed textual evidence for this view earlier in my paper. Moreover, Davidson's oversight of Ibn Rushd's expressions, such as "simple demonstration" (*al-barāhīn al-basīṭa*), as we observe shortly, and the modality of "necessity" (*ḍarūra*) employed in the propositions and explanations of the argument—expressing a crucial element of Ibn Rushd's definition of knowledge—appears to be a significant omission. In summary, his assertions on this matter are at odds with what I refer to as "the coherent and holistic picture of Ibn Rushd's teleological argument".

In the above passage, where "the natural theology of common sense" is presented, we learn that the teleological argument expresses knowledge in both the ordinary people's version and the philosophers' version. For example, although the pragmatic elements of organ teleology may number in the "thousands" in favor of one side, both types of arguments still express knowledge. However, it would still be meaningful to ask some questions. Is ordinary public knowledge of this argument a function of demonstration, a top-level deductive inference? Does the epistemic status of the teleological argument, *as the religious way* in which religion or Islamic theism calls all people to accept the existence of God qualify as a demonstration (*burhān*), the most venerable inferential form of "knowledge", one of the five intellectual virtues? Although Ibn Rushd clearly points out its status as knowledge when he presents the argument as a "religious way" above, what more can be said about it?

According to Ibn Rushd, the cosmological argument (*ḥudūth*) proposed by Muslim theologians fails as it falls short of meeting both religious and epistemic criteria. This argument, as per Ibn Rushd, is "neither a certain (*yaqīn*) theoretical way nor a certain (*yaqīn*) religious way". If we remember that demonstration, which is a knowledge-producing function, is defined as deductive reasoning expressing *certainty*, the epistemic importance of this qualification can be grasped. Immediately following the statement that it is neither a certain theoretical way nor a certain religious way, we should proceed to elaborate on his subsequent remarks. In this context, I would like to address a topic that, regrettably, is not extensively explored in the literature, including Ibn Rushd's arguments regarding *knowing* the existence of God (the Artisan) in a "religious way".

Let me give an example from the contemporary literature on this subject. Taneli Kukkonen (Kukkonen 2002) argues that Ibn Rushd's teleological argument, especially *Dalil al-'Inaya*, does not constitute "scientific proof" and does not convey the notion of "knowledge". This reading of Averroes seems to have overlooked much of the important information offered in my paper, which is not mainly based on *Kashf*. This could be argued in many subsequent points. I have included the sources and page references for all this foundational data in my entire article: (i) The teleological argument is a (simple) demonstration even as a religious proof. (ii) Therefore, it uses simple *syllogisms* (*al-maqāyis*) rather than complex ones. (iii) Being *certain and conclusive* (*qat'*, *yaqīn*). (iv) Due to the knowledge-generating function of demonstration, the argument in question has been repeatedly described by Ibn Rushd as knowledge (*'ilm*). (v) The argument in question also has been repeatedly characterized by Ibn Rushd as the way or argument of both *the philosophers* and the ordinary people. (vi) Ibn Rushd characterizes it as the best argument; (vii) Ibn Rushd uses the terms "know conclusively" (*'alima 'ala'l-qat'*) three times for Dalil al-'Inaya, i.e., teleological argument, even as a religious way. (viii) Religious ways, that is, arguments about the existence of God, are simple syllogisms and express certainty, and therefore they are *simple demonstrations* (*al-barāhīn al-basīṭa*), and although they are different from the demonstration specific to philosophy (*burhāniyye ṣināiyya*), the difference is in the details. (ix) We know with "absolute certainty" (*qata'an yaqīnan*) that the effects of heavenly bodies are for the purpose of providing providence (*'ināya*) to the world (SCM). (x) Aristotle's defense of [Dalil] al-'Inaya, as Ibn Rushd states in the LCM, as a form of knowledge. (xi) As I have shown in my paper, Ibn Rushd basically gives the same content regarding his teleological argument in both his early work (SCM, *Talkhīs mā ba'd tabī'ah*), his middle period work (*Kashf*) and his last major commentary (LCM). In all of them, it is clearly stated that this argument expresses demonstration, certainty, and knowledge. (xii) The most powerful ones, the strongest epistemic modality terms, such as "necessary (. . .is not possible)", which Ibn Rushd *uses systematically* in the propositions and explanations of the argument, and which express the definition of "knowledge", which is one of the five intellectual virtues in the *Middle Commentary on Posterior Analytics*. Finally, (xiii) the argument from providence is an investigation of (First) Agent and First End, as the concept of agent cause is abundantly used in the propositions and explanations of the argument and Ibn Rushd's acceptance of this investigation (First Agent, First Form, and First End) as an investigation within the science of metaphysics, expressing knowledge.

Following the exploration of "certainty" earlier, I intend to shed light on the concepts of "simplicity" and "demonstrativeness" associated with the religious way, respectively:

> . . .when the religious ways are investigated carefully, they are found to include, at most, two characteristics: certainty (*yaqīn*) and simplicity (*basīṭ*) rather than complexity, I mean, having few premises, whereby their conclusions are close to their first premises. (Ibn Rushd 1998, p. 116; Averroes 2005, p. 31)

Does Ibn Rushd's common-sense natural theology in the teleological argument exhibit no structural, epistemic difference whatsoever from the "philosophical way" I have discussed in metaphysical science? According to him, since religion primarily addresses ordinary people and they are far from technical knowledge, religion does not use the long, complex deductive inferences or syllogisms (*al-maqāyis*) that provide "knowledge" in philosophy while teaching this audience about the existence of God and His relationship with the universe. While religion uses demonstration on limited issues, such as the existence and unity of God, so that the widespread epistemic class it addresses can understand, it uses *simple ways* that give "knowledge" in the sense that the conclusion proposition is close to the self-evident premise (*al-mukaddimāt al-ma'rūfa*) (Ibn Rushd 1998, p. 161; Averroes 2005, pp. 78–79). The following characterizations of religious arguments are okay: "certain (*yaqīn*) religious way," "deductive inference" (*al-maqāyis*), and "simple inference" (*basīṭ*). However, the qualification of the demonstration (*burhān*), whose function of producing "knowledge" is quite clear, is not explicitly mentioned. Where does he state that certain, simple religious syllogisms are included in demonstrative theory? After a lengthy critical

evaluation of the cosmological argument (*ḥudūth*) presented by Muslim theologians, Ibn Rushd explicitly delves into the distinction between *philosophical and religious demonstration*, and hence *knowledge*, as follows:

> We mention it merely to show that, what those people [Muslim theologians] imagined to be a demonstration (*burhān*), is not really one. It is not even one of the arguments that are suitable for the *public* (*al-jumhūr*); by which I mean *the simple demonstrations* (*al-barāhīn al-basīṭa*) whereby God has required *all* His worshipers to believe in Him. Thus, it will have become evident to you from this that this method [Cosmological argument of Muslim theologians] is not *technically demonstrable* (*burhāniyye ṣināiyye*) or religious (Ibn Rushd 1998, p. 111; Averroes 2005, p. 27). Italics are not found in this quoted text.

What can we say if we apply this information about the *simple demonstration* to Ibn Rushd's teleological argument, which he states is a *simple, certain religious syllogism*? Both versions of Ibn Rushd's teleological argument, as I presented above, have a single premise and a single main conclusion. Since the teleological argument, in a religious way, starts from self-evident premises (*al-mukaddimāt al-ma'rūfa*) for ordinary people to understand, the first and only premise of the teleological argument, according to Ibn Rushd, is self-evident. This argument, again, according to him, is a certain religious way, a simple demonstration of the understanding of the people; therefore, the argument clearly refers to "knowledge", which is one of the five intellectual virtues. Thus, as the passage clearly states (since religion addresses primarily the ordinary people or the majority), God obliges *the majority* to believe in *His existence* through simple demonstration inference, that is, by the teleological argument.

Certainly, the philosophical demonstration that I provided above in the science of metaphysics, while not a simple but rather a complex method, involves numerous premises. Consequently, its conclusion is quite distant from its initial premise. Since this reasoning is already a technical demonstration, it also encompasses distinct contents belonging to Aristotelian philosophy. For instance, in *Kashf*, Ibn Rushd refrains from providing definitions for essential concepts of the teleological argument, such as the "agent cause" and the related concept of creation, which is defined according to this concept. He does not assert that suitability for living beings on Earth arises because heavenly bodies move by imitating God and seeking to resemble Him. Additionally, he does not explicitly state that God's agency is realized through the utilization of other agents as intermediaries, such as the heavenly bodies. Due to his dialectical method, *Kashf* incorporates many verses from the Qur'an that he thinks point to providence in the universe and expresses simple forms of the argument. In contrast, in LCM, as previously mentioned in presenting the teleological argument, Ibn Rushd incorporates "Aristotle's view on providence", his analogies, and basic statements on the subject, such as "man begets a man like himself and the sun", justifying them extensively. Moreover, he thoroughly explores the implications of the concept of agent cause concerning creation, a concept he claims to have *borrowed from Aristotle*, and delves into the Aristotelian a priori principle that dismisses the notion of creation from nothing.

Nevertheless, as both forms of the same argument aim at conclusive demonstrative reasoning to produce *knowledge* about the existence of God, Ibn Rushd emphasizes that the difference between them is not fundamental; rather, "the difference is in the details". Therefore, in the propositions and explanations of both arguments (religious and philosophical way), he uses the strongest epistemic modalities, such as *necessity* and *impossibility*, which means applying *the definition of knowledge*. Now, let us move on to examine a more advanced version of Ibn Rushd's argument than the first version. I also continue to include epistemic evaluations there.

4.2. Restatement of the Argument from Providence (RP2) and Teleologically the Best of All Possible Worlds

In this context, our current topic is to soften the strong anthropocentric element that seems to be included in RP1 and re-express the suitability by extending it to encompass all

beings in the universe. The incorporation of three teleological variables represents a clear restatement and deepening of the argument as de re modality and a metaphysical defense of the doctrine of teleologically the best of all possible worlds. He re-presents the following improved new argument, many pages after RP1, which I have presented above, and which appears to yield significant improvements over the first. Just before presenting the second version, which I give below, the Commentator reminds us that this argument is certain or "conclusive" (*kat'ī*) and "simple" (*basīṭ*) for ordinary people.

It seems that religion's methodology for teaching ordinary people how the universe came to be or how it indicates the existence of God is to use certain simple deductive inference ways that yield *knowledge*. Now, let us move on to a new version of the argument from providence, which is also constructed with such a methodology. This second, much stronger version of the argument from providence is clearly championed as a logical consequence of the modal definition of knowledge and the fact that *the universe is not metaphysically contingent but necessary* (de re modality), which I included in the first part of my paper. It is defended on a kind of metaphysical basis that can be called "teleologically the best of all possible worlds". The new and very powerful formal structure of the argument presented by Ibn Rushd is as follows:

The argument from providence. (Dalil al-'Inaya. **RP2**: religious argument from providence): (Ibn Rushd 1998, p. 163; Averroes 2005, p. 80). (I made some changes in the translation. There are no italics found in the quoted text below.)

1. The universe with *all its parts* (*bi-Jamīi aczāihi*) is *suited* to (*muwāfiqan*) the existence of man and *all existing entities* [in the world].

C. Everything that is *suited* in all its parts to a certain action is one and directed towards a *single purpose* (*gāya*) and is *necessarily* created (*maṣnū' ḍarūra*).

i. Therefore, the universe is made (*maṣnū'*) and has a Maker (*ṣāni'an*).

Ibn Rushd's optimism about the argument from providence for ordinary people (and philosophers) does not merely qualify it with the highest epistemic qualifications, such as its necessary modality, which is a fundamental component of the definition of knowledge. Immediately after presenting the propositions of the RP2, he distinguishes the argument from providence from other arguments in terms of intellectual value: "...it is the best (*ashrafu*) argument for proving the *existence* of the Maker".

In this developed version of the argument, in the first proposition, Ibn Rushd states that *benefit and suitability to the desired end* are observed for *all existing beings*, including humans, in *all parts* of the universe. This strong de re modality basis that he attributes to the universe corresponds to an essential or necessary fact that cannot be teleologically otherwise. This fact also means that his anthropocentrism in the first premise of RP1 is significantly weakened in favor of the teleological theory of the 'best of all possible worlds' for *all* living things.

Davidson seems to have formed his views on Ibn Rushd's teleological argument based solely on RP1, which is an anthropocentric argument. He does not seem to be aware of RP2, in which anthropocentrism is eliminated, nor does he seem to be aware of the "philosophical way" of metaphysical science in SCM and LCM, which does not see the universe as merely anthropocentric: "The teleological argument is not, however, a fully adequate demonstration of the existence of God, the chief reason presumably being that argumentation from the functionality of nature views the universe anthropocentrically". (Davidson 1987, p. 230).

In this new form (RP2), as in the content of metaphysical science, Ibn Rushd repeatedly emphasizes that the heavenly bodies (the sun, the moon, and the stars), which he says imitate God and move by trying to resemble him, are the "cause" of the following phenomena in the world, through which suitability to all beings in the world emerges: four seasons, day and night, rains, winds, settlement in certain regions of the world. Here, the new teleological elements are the suitability of water for aquatic animals and the suitability of air for flying animals. Subsequently, he emphasizes the essential or necessary quality,

which can be said to mean the teleologically best of possible worlds, as in the first premise, regarding each part created by the First Agent: "…and that if *any part* (*shayun min*) of this creation and structure were disturbed the existence of creatures here below would be disturbed." (Ibn Rushd 1998, pp. 162–63; Averroes 2005, p. 80).

Ibn Rushd also expresses divine providence in terms of the organs or faculties of beings in the world, as we see in the discussion in metaphysics. Ibn Rushd also has very strong statements about the teleology of faculties and organs. If it were not for the powers in the bodies of animals and plants in general, and the powers of nourishment and sensation in the human body in particular, and if it were not for the effects arising from the movements of the heavenly bodies, it *would not be possible* for these creatures to continue their existence with only their bodies for one hour (Galen and other philosophers) or a *single moment* (Ibn Rushd) (Ibn Rushd 1998, p. 192; Averroes 2005, p. 112). Therefore, it seems that the teleology of organs or faculties corresponds to essential or necessary factual states of affairs.

Does he make any other explicit statements about the epistemic status of this new and improved argument that meets the definition of knowledge, other than, for example, its necessary modality in the concluding proposition and the universality of the argument? They are quite rigorous. Here, there are both strong epistemic concepts and a defense of the teleologically best of possible worlds, such as "all the parts of the universe" in premise one. Ibn Rushd says the following about the person who observes all these teleological phenomena I mentioned here:

> He would *know conclusively (*'*alima* '*ala'l-qat*'*)* that it is *impossible* that this suitability (*muvāfaka*) of *all the parts* (*fî jamî' ajzā al-ālam*) of the universe to *mankind, animals, and plants* is a matter of chance. It must rather be intended by an intending and willing Agent who is God Almighty. He would also *know conclusively (*'*alima* '*ala'l-qat*'*)* that the world is created (*al-maṣnū*'). (Ibn Rushd 1998, pp. 162–63; Averroes 2005, p. 80)

(I made some changes in the translation (for example, it is an omission that the second phrase "know conclusively" in the Arabic text does not appear in the English translation), and I have added italics.)

In addition to the twice-repeated assertion of (knowing conclusively*)* the strong epistemic statement below in PRA2 (and, of course, in RP2 above), Ibn Rushd further elucidates the argument explicitly with his definition of modal knowledge in the *Middle Commentary on Posterior Analytic*. Now, I want to formally express the three arguments from providence that differ from RP2 as inference steps. The above demonstration (RP1 and RP2) was a demonstration of existence (*burhān al-vujūd*). However, now the three new arguments of the Chief of Philosophers, which I formalize below, correspond to a reductio ad absurdum or syllogism (*hulfī qiyās/burhān*, reverse demonstration), which expresses knowledge as a deductive inference in traditional demonstration theory. Ibn Rushd defines a reverse demonstration as follows: "If this is false, its contradiction is true, for contradictions cannot both be false". (Ibn Rushd 1984, pp. 74–75). This reasoning first shows the falsehood of the contradiction of proposition P, the truth of which it aims to prove, and then proves P, thereby providing "knowledge".

In this new argument from providence in the quote I gave in the previous passage, Ibn Rushd seems to have used the demonstrative reasoning in the form of reductio ad absurdum that I mentioned above, as in the version in metaphysics. Accordingly, **PRA1** can be expressed as follows:

1. It is *impossible* for the suitability of *all parts* of the universe, for humans, animals, and plants, to occur by chance.

C. Therefore, we *know conclusively (*'*alima* '*ala'l-qat*'*)* that the world is created (*al-maṣnū*').

PRA1, like the main argument from providence RP2, talks about suitability to *all parts* of the universe, not only to humans but to *all living things*. I see this rather strong universal judgment as part of teleologically the best of all possible worlds' theory, as I stated above.

Just before presenting RP2, which I included above, Ibn Rushd presents the following reasoning (**PRA2**), which appears in the form of reductio ad absurdum, which I formulate as follows:[8]

1. The suitabilities (*muwāfaqa*) in the universe exist by chance without a Maker.

C. However, the person who observes the suitabilities mentioned in the universe *necessarily knows* (*ya'lemu ḍarūra*) that it is *not possible* for these suitabilities to exist by chance without a Maker.

   i. Therefore, the person *necessarily knows* that the suitabilities in the world are realized by a Maker/the Artisan.

It should be noted that conclusion C here says something beyond the fact that premise 1 is false. Here, Ibn Rushd claims that the suitabilities of things in the universe for their benefit and the end would lead to the existence of the First Agent or First End, "necessarily in a way that would not otherwise be possible", which expresses the definition of knowledge, which is one of the five intellectual virtues.

Now, let us delve a bit further into the metaphysical theory of "the teleologically best of all possible worlds". Ibn Rushd touches upon the content of the argument from providence, more particularly the content of its single premise, which he says is self-evident, and the strong necessary modal epistemic structure of this content, de re modality, with particular reference to what I call the three fundamental teleological variables, as follows:

> For just as a certain person, upon seeing *a sensible object* and finding it made in a *certain shape*, of a *certain measure*, and *in a [certain] position* conducive (*muwāfiqan*) altogether both to the advantage (*menfa'a*) known to accrue from that sensible object and *the end* (*al-gāya*) desired, is forced to admit that if that object were to exist in a *different shape*, or a *different position*, or a *different measure*, *that advantage would not accrue from it*, he would, then, *know conclusively ('alima 'ala'l-qat'*) that that object has a maker who made it and that it is for this reason that its form, position, and measure came to be conducive to that advantage; and that it is *not possible* (*laysa yumkinu*) for the union of all these factors to be conducive to (*muwāfaqa*) such advantage by accident (Ibn Rushd 1998, p. 162; Averroes 2005, pp. 79–80). Italics are not found in the text.

Due to its significant importance, I would like to analyze this passage where the argument from providence is elaborated and explained. It is very important that the concept of suitability (conducive), which is one of the most basic concepts of the first and only premise of the argument from providence, is used twice in this explanation. Also, here is the four-time mention of the advantage or benefit (*manfa'a*), the strong pragmatic element that Ibn Rushd had previously stated would give a complete knowledge of God. In this context, the suitability of an object, such as a stone, to its intended purpose and benefit—determined by its shape, size (or measure), and position—indicates a Maker (the Artisan), an Agent who acts, in a manner that *could not possibly occur* by chance. In terms of the history of the teleological argument, it is noteworthy that just before introducing RP2, Ibn Rushd provides a stone example illustrating the benefit and suitability derived from three teleological variables. In contrast to Paley, where the stone is not considered a teleological element, Ibn Rushd asserts that if the stone demonstrates three teleological variables—for instance, if it serves the purpose of providing a unique benefit like facilitating sitting in a way that cannot be otherwise—it *necessarily* owes its existence to an agent cause and cannot possibly be a product of chance. Considering the stone example provided by Ibn Rushd after the extensive passage I quoted above, if the stone's *suitability for benefits and purposes*, for example, as sitting, is not observed, it can be inferred that the properties of the existence of the object under teleological evaluation are coincidental. According to the de re modal expression of this situation, the counterpart of chance in existence is not an essential but an accidental property. Following this pivotal passage, we can define proposition P as "There is a necessary order and divine providence in the universe", or this external de re modal teleology, as follows:

> **DRT1**. S knows P if and only if, for example, in a sensible object, the benefit and suitability for the end of living beings would not counterfactually arise if that object had a different shape, or a different position, or a different measure.
>
> C. Therefore, that object has a First Agent, making it impossible to attribute its existence to chance.

Just as Ibn Rushd discusses the suitability of a living being's external conditions, as seen in DRT1, he also addresses the suitability of its internal conditions, that is, what I call organ or faculty teleology. As recalled, according to him, faculties such as the senses, imagination, and reason, or to a certain extent, organs, are elements of divine providence bestowed upon living beings for their protection, security, and survival. Therefore, we must also define P in terms of this internal teleology (where the three teleological variables can be expressed as different variables, such as "functions", to satisfy the teleology of the faculties):

> **DRT2**. S knows P if and only if the organs or faculties—such as the senses, imagination or reason—that actually exist in a living being were to have different shapes, different positions or different measurements, the benefit and suitability to the end would not arise counterfactually.
>
> C. Therefore, that living being has a First Agent, making it impossible to attribute its existence to chance.

In the extensive passage I quoted above, the argument from providence seems to be defended as a *reductio ad absurdum* with three teleological variables. Accordingly, I formulate **PRA3** as follows:

1. If the sensible object x had a counterfactually *different shape, position and measurement*, the benefit and suitability to its end could not have occurred.

C. Therefore, S knows for certain *('alima 'ala'l-qat'*) that it is a fact that the benefit and suitability to the end of the object x, with its three teleological variables, *cannot* arise by chance and must be based on a First Agent.

Now, we can move on to the general conclusions of my paper, including this section.

5. Concluding Remarks

In Ibn Rushd's philosophy, the study of the First End, the First Form, and especially the First Agent, which is of central importance for the teleological argument, falls within the scope of metaphysics. Therefore, while he constructs the teleological argument in terms of the First Agent, both in his metaphysical works and in his dialectical works, he repeatedly expresses it with the predicates of "knowledge" for both the class of philosophers and the class of ordinary people or the folk.

As he states in the LCM, according to Ibn Rushd, Aristotle also defended the teleological argument (argument from providence) in metaphysics. In metaphysics, the universe has the property of necessity (*al-ḍarūri*) as a modality, in the sense that it cannot be otherwise than the order it has due to the First Cause. Therefore, contrary to Ibn Sīnā's view, which he rejected many times, it is not contingent. According to him, the very strong conclusion that follows from this is that there is a necessary order in the universe, not a contingent one, due to the First Agent.

Is Ibn Rushd's epistemology compatible with this metaphysics? Following this ontological conclusion, he defines "knowledge" as a function of this necessary order in the universe in terms of de re modality: It is a belief that it is impossible for something to be other than what it is or that it is necessary for it to be. Simply put, the teleological argument for the existence of a necessary order in the universe, which is actually part of the metaphysics of form, is that a fact in the universe gives rise to belief in that fact and that the fact-belief relation is realized with complete correspondence. This is why the teleological argument is called "knowledge" ('ilm, epistemē), one of the five intellectual virtues in the virtue reliabilist account of knowledge.

We can say the following about Section 2: Does the fact that *the benefit and suitability to the end* of a stone or another object, which would not emerge in *another* situation (in terms of teleological properties such as shape, location, and measure), indicate to the Artisan an inductive inference that does not express "knowledge" (*'ilm or ma'rifa*) in Ibn Rushd's epistemology? At the beginning of my paper, I stated that according to Ibn Rushd, induction does not give knowledge. In fact, this question can be easily evaded by recalling that Ibn Rushd explicitly states in the passage that one *knows conclusively* (*'alima 'ala'l-qat'*) that the object has a maker. He repeatedly uses the *necessary* modality, which is part of the definition of knowledge, in the argument and describes the argument as a simple demonstration (*al-barāhīn al-basīṭa*). He doesn't merely say "knows", but he says "conclusively". If it is *not possible* for the benefit and suitability for the end of an object to emerge when teleological variables such as its shape, measure, and location differ, this modality expressing *necessity* shows that that object, its final cause, or agent cause is grasped in a way that expresses *knowledge*. This was part of Ibn Rushd's epistemology. We must also consider part of his metaphysics. Here, one's inquiry is a causal inquiry into the agent cause (First Agent), the final cause (First End), and the formal cause (First Form), and this investigation in Ibn Rushd, as I presented in the introduction, belongs solely to the science of metaphysics. Ibn Rushd clearly explains the argument from providence with the strongest modal concepts (i.e., saying it is not possible) to meet the epistemic requirements of the conception of knowledge. If recalled, the concept of *necessity*, which is one of the two basic components of the concept of knowledge, means "it is *not possible* for something to be in a situation other than the one it is in". It seems that this epistemic modality and its application for this argument, for instance, with three teleological properties (the benefit and suitability for the end, which would not occur when something is in another situation), led Ibn Rushd to advocate *teleologically* for the best of all possible worlds.

Now, I want to compare RP2 with RP1 in terms of some general points. Both are clearly characterized by Ibn Rushd as simply demonstrative (*al-barāhīn al-basīṭa*) religious (and philosophical) arguments expressing knowledge *('ilm*, *yaqīn*). Both arguments primarily fall within the field of examining metaphysical science, which epistemically necessarily leads to the existence of the First Agent, starting from the *necessary metaphysical order* in the universe as a de re modality in a way that meets the definition of "knowledge", which is one of the five intellectual virtues. The content of the argument, which expresses knowledge to ordinary people, stems from the fact that it is a simple inference, that is, with few premises, its conclusion proposition is close to its first and only self-evident premise, rendering it a certain deductive inference or syllogism. Ibn Rushd gives lengthy examples of various verses in the Qur'an that point to this argument in *Kashf*, which is considered among his dialectical (and rhetorical) or theological works. As for the technical demonstration specific to philosophers or the purely Aristotelian philosophical content, as outlined earlier in the case of metaphysical science, this way also conveys knowledge. However, it employs long, complex deductive inferences or syllogisms (*al-maqāyis*), as illustrated in the reasoning structure I have formulated.

According to Ibn Rushd, the argument of providence, as the superior argument simpliciter, is the way of both the ordinary people and the philosophers. In other words, it is both a religious and a philosophical way, and the epistemic difference resulting from the use of these two different methods (simple demonstration and technical demonstration) regarding the epistemic status of the argument is found in the details. This is because the teleological argument constructed with both methods is expressed with an understanding of de re necessity and in a manner that meets the highest epistemic standards.

Now, finally, I would like to analyze the first premise of the main teleological argument RP2. Its sole premise posits that the universe, "with all its parts," is suitable for "the existence of all beings" in the world. Consequently, each being in the world, with its infinite parts, seems to be united in a single action and a single purpose; for example, internal teleology, such as the suitability of organs and faculties for the existence and survival of

that organism, and external teleology, such as the suitability of water and air for the benefit of the many living creatures involved.

The conclusion drawn from this suggests that everything suitable for a single action for all beings with all their parts is directed to a single purpose and is necessarily created (maṣnū'). As I stated earlier, this de re modality expresses a necessity that can lead us to the conclusion that the universe is teleologically the best of all possible worlds. RP2 has the concluding proposition that the world is a work of art (maṣnū') and that it has a Maker or the Artisan (al-Ṣāni'). The argument that the universe is directed to a single end clearly speaks of God as the First End, the First Agent, and ultimately the First Form, as presented by the science of metaphysics, according to the philosophical system of the Great Commentator.

RP2, which is also part of a common-sense natural theology, is directly compatible with the teleological content in metaphysical science, much like RP1. Therefore, I have achieved my aim, which was to paint a *coherent and holistic picture* of Ibn Rushd's teleological argument, as I stated at the beginning of my paper. While the benefit and suitability for the end were emphasized *only* anthropocentrically in RP1, in RP2, more precisely, this predicate is additionally predicated on *all* parts of the universe and *all* beings. Thus, it appears that RP2 has made significant improvements over RP1.

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Notes

1 See the debate between Ibn Rushd and Ibn Sīnā on the subject matter of metaphysics and which discipline (natural science or metaphysics) will prove the existence of God (Bertolacci 2007). Compare with Section 6.1 of the following paper: Ben Ahmed and Pasnau (2021).

2 Drawing on Ibn Rushd's early work, *Short Commentary on Posterior Analytic*, Deborah L. Black argues that he followed al-Farabi in weakening the traditional link between necessity and knowledge. Accordingly, Ibn Rushd defines absolute certainty, which is not necessary, as certainty at a certain time. Thus, through the non-necessary form of absolute certainty, Ibn Rushd seems to accept that contingent truths can be known with absolute certainty. However, I could not see any indication that Ibn Rushd continued such an acceptance or weakened the link in his later *Middle Commentary on Posterior Analytics*, as I have used here (Black 2019). In fact, as I discuss shortly, my interpretation may differ, touching on issues such as the attribution of necessity to the universe, de re modality, and the concept of "teleologically the best of all possible worlds".

3 I deleted the phrase "with the help of" in the translation because there is no such word in the original Arabic text. The text is not italicized.

4 I made minor changes to the translation. The text is not italicized.

5 Ibn Rushd distinguishes the agent cause, which is the subject of metaphysical examination, from the moving cause, which is the subject of physical examination, as follows: ". . .every agent is a mover although not every mover is an agent..". (Ibn Rushd 1990, pp. 1524–25; 1986, p. 120).

6 According to the philosophers' understanding of the First Agent, the First Mover exercises its agency through *intermediaries*. However, in the view of Muslim theologians, there are no intermediary beings, and there is only one agent: "they said that there is one single Agent for all the existents, that He is in immediate contact with them and that the action of this single Agent is concerned at one and the same time with contrary and concordant actions infinite in number" (Ibn Rushd 1990, pp. 1503–504; 1986, p. 111).

7 The standard and common word used to express the word "creation" is "*khalaqa*". Ibn Rushd sometimes uses this general word, as in the previous argument. But what is the meaning of this word in his philosophy? "The meaning of khālık is the creator of substances (*mukhtari'a*)", says Ibn Rushd (1998, p. 193; Averroes 2005, p. 114). Accordingly, as I have detailed in the previous argument, he clearly uses these two words synonymously, actually meaning agent cause, and of course, the word does not mean creation from nothing, as he states in *Kashf* and other works. That's why I use these two words synonymously here, in accordance with his perspective.

[8] "For he will know necessarily, then, that it would have been impossible for this suitability to exist, had the world not been the work of a Maker, but rather of chance" (Ibn Rushd 1998, p. 163; Averroes 2005, p. 80).

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Article

Analogia Entis in a Monastic Vision: Thomas Merton's Answer to the Modern World

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Abstract: The idea of analogia entis has undergone a long intellectual development and gained unprecedented importance in the twentieth century with the elaboration of Przywara. It seems difficult to correlate the development of this classical theological idea with Thomas Merton (1915–1968). Nevertheless, in the face of the challenges of the modern world, Merton's way of thinking resonates with many of the connotations of analogia entis as articulated by Przywara. This paper attempts to argue that Merton, in his late works, alludes to the metaphysics, epistemology, and, by extension, the methodology of inter-religious dialogue that analogia entis entails by elaborating on the ideas of natural contemplation, symbolism, and metaphysical intuition.

Keywords: Thomas Merton; natural contemplation; symbolism; metaphysical intuition; in-and-beyond structure; participatory relationship; analogy of being

1. Introduction

The term analogy, which was employed in the ancient Greek metaphysical tradition and evolved along with the development of the work of Thomas Aquinas and his successors, occupied an important place in medieval theology and philosophy. In the 20th century, analogia entis gained unprecedented importance in controversies between modern philosophy and Christian theology after the notion's development by Przywara. It seems difficult to correlate the development of this classical theological idea with Thomas Merton (1915–1968), an American monk who was not skilled in theological writing. Merton's work does not use such terminus technicus, except for an early treatise on the concept of analogy.[1] Nevertheless, in the face of the challenges of the modern world, Merton's way of thinking resonates with many of the connotations of analogia entis as elaborated by Przywara. Analogia entis, as an ontological form articulating God in-and-beyond creation, criticizes all one-sided static theology and philosophy, and instead claims a dynamic two-way movement, that is, God's presence in and beyond creation and creation's desire for God. Creaturely being, as an unresolved *suspended middle*, is always in a rhythmic movement, rejecting all attempts to be fixed or objectified as essence or existence (Przywara 2014). This existential experience permeates most of Merton's monastic life.

Merton entered the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance (O.C.S.O.) on 10 December 1941 at the Abbey of our Lady of Gethsemani in Kentucky, USA, and died on the very same day in 1968. Most of Merton's monastic life was nurtured by the Pre-Vatican II Church, and it is no surprise that his early thought was shaped by neo-scholasticism, embodying a relatively strong dualistic mentality of contemptus mundi. Beginning in the 1950s, however, Merton began to turn to the writings of the Church Fathers as a resource for his teaching. At the same time, Merton received the writings of a number of "ressourcement" theologians (Merton 1997, pp. 384–85, 389). Their attempts to break out of the neo-scholastic theological framework and their endeavors to retrace the early patristic thought helped Merton to reflect on his early education and set the tone for his later theological reflections. In addition to these avant-garde theologies, Merton's privileged position as a celebrated author brought him into

contact with intellectuals from all over the world, and in particular, after becoming the Master of Novice in 1955, he was exposed to a rich and varied range of intellectual resources. Merton first became interested in psychology, and then, in the summer of 1956, began to read Buddhist writings as well as the writings of Russian religious thinkers (especially those expelled from Russia by Lenin). All these readings and reflections bore ripe fruit in Merton's works of the 1960s and are the subject of this paper. This paper attempts to argue that Merton, in his late works, alludes to the metaphysics, epistemology, and, by extension, the methodology of inter-religious dialogue that analogia entis entails by elaborating on the ideas of natural contemplation, symbolism, and metaphysical intuition. With the discussion of Merton's case, the paper attempts to illustrate the idea of analogia entis in a monastic vision.

2. Natural Contemplation as Ontological Analogy: A Corrective to Neo-Scholasticism's Anonymous Dualism

Merton's later work is to some extent understood in the context of a correction of earlier thought. This requires us to devote a little space to the characterization of the neo-scholastic theology that influenced early Merton and what such a theology meant for Merton in a monastic context. The Catholic church at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries confronted a great challenge from post-Enlightenment rationalism and liberalism. Post-Kantian philosophy eliminated the ability of pure reason to know God, leading to two possible endpoints: first, the invention of a subject-based, immanent, moral religion and ultimately *pantheism* (whereby the world is essentially everything); and, second, the surrender of the theological discursiveness in favor of traditional fideism and ultimately *theopanism* (whereby God is or does essentially everything). In both directions, the tension between the infinite and the finite was collapsed into one or another form of identity. In order to avoid these two extremes, neo-scholasticism reasserted the ability of discursive reason and affirmed the two orders of knowledge: discursive reason can prove the existence of and some of the attributes of God through its own capacity without resorting to revelation; but the mysteries hidden in God will be revealed to man by faith. Each of these two orders has its own goal, and thus becomes a separate "two-tiered" system—the order of nature and the order of grace—which guarantees the ability of human natural reason to know God, but also reserves the territory for faith. However, the neo-scholastic approach of rationalist apologetics, which tried to answer the militant rationalists on the rationalist's own terms, carried within it a secularist or atheistic logic, that is, a potential of breaking free from revelation. Such externalism has in fact implied a dualism in which the two are completely separated, where the supernatural order is viewed as a 'top up' for natural reason.[2] When such a theological mindset is adopted into the monastic context, it results in the same two-tiered split structure: a complete separation between theology and spirituality/mysticism, active contemplation and infused contemplation, action and contemplation. The whole focus of the spiritual life, as Merton pointed out, is on the question "when did man cease to be himself the principal agent and yield this primacy to the Spirit of God?" (Merton 2003, p. 67). We can find Merton's early work deeply involved in pondering and wrestling with these questions, which have already presupposed a clear dichotomy between the supernatural and the natural. It averts an interior connection between the deepest dynamism of human spirits and the supernatural revelation of God and ends up with the bitter fruit of a sterilized and barren mind.

In order to overcome the dualism that arises in spiritual life, Merton found a way out in the writings of the Church Fathers. Merton likewise avoids the extremes of *pantheism* and *theopanism*, retaining a basic tension between the supernatural and the natural order. But in Merton's view, the issue was not the proper disposition of natural reason as neo-scholasticism understood, but a retrieval of a holistic vision based on the ontological relationship of God–cosmos–humanity that is implicit in the doctrine of creation.

In 1961 Merton gave a series of lectures for young priests on Christian mysticism that were later collected into a book titled *An Introduction to Christian Mysticism* (Merton 2008). The aim of the lectures was to restore the unity of theology and mysticism. The approach

Merton used in the lectures was similar to that of the Communio theologians (Rowland 2017, pp. 96–97), which begins with the contemporary pastoral problem and then combs through the relevant scriptural exegesis and Patristic, medieval, and more contemporary writing on the topic to discuss how the two (theology and mysticism) evolved from unity to division, so as to reflect on and remedy the current problem of dualism.

Merton points out that the foundation of Christian mysticism was laid in St. John and St. Paul and became the source of the idea of theosis or divinization for Church Fathers. This foundation is the mystery of Christ's incarnation and the recapitulation of all creatures in Christ, on which Christian theology and spirituality can become one (Merton 2008, pp. 38–42). This metaphysical framework of the Incarnation–Recapitulation, which is rendered at the beginning of the lecture series, lends an essential background for understanding the relationship between theology and spirituality. Citing Vladimir Lossky (1903–1958), Merton argues that the Fathers' commitment to the doctrine of Incarnation was not a matter of intellectual enjoyment, but rather concerned with the divinization of the created world.

> . . . the struggle of the Church to safeguard the purity of dogma in every age is at the same time a struggle to guarantee to each Christian free access to mystical union. St. Irenaeus against the Gnostics defended the very concept of deification as man's last end. St. Athanasius, etc. against the Arians defend {the} divinity of {the} Word because {the} Word opens to us the way to deification. . .{Likewise} St. Cyril, etc. against {the} Nestorians, because Nestorianism separates {the} humanity and divinity in Christ; {the} Cappadocian Fathers against {the} Monophysites and Apollinarians, to show that the fullness of human nature has been united to God in the Word ("what has not been assumed is not saved") . . ."In each case the central preoccupation is always one thing that is at stake: the possibility, the mode, or the means of union with God". (Merton 2008, p. 66)

According to Merton's survey of the Church Fathers, the Incarnation is closely linked to the divinization of man and the restoration of all creatures. Furthermore, in his commentary on Maximus the Confessor's (580–662) 'Contemplation and the Universe', Merton connects the Incarnation with the doctrine of creation in terms of natural contemplation, which suggests a metaphysical structure of God in-and-beyond creation. Merton begins his discussion with the epistemology of natural contemplation, and then proceeds to elaborate its ontological implication. Merton points out that natural contemplation (theoria physike) is "a contemplation according to nature (*physis*). It is also a contemplation of God in and through nature, in and through things He has created, in history. It is the *multiformis sapientia*, the gnosis that apprehends the wisdom and glory of God, especially His wisdom as Creator and Redeemer . . . *Theoria physike* {is thus the} reception of God's revelation of Himself in creatures, in history, in Scripture." (ibid., pp. 122–23). The 'natural' in theoria physike is not distinct from and opposed to the 'supernatural', where God is contemplated by the power of one's own nature in the modern sense; rather, God is contemplated in nature (ibid., p. 125). In other words, the activity of natural contemplation presupposes the goodness of creation and the intimate relationship between the divine mystery and nature. As Merton quotes Maximus: "We must not believe that sin caused this unique masterpiece which is this visible world in which God manifests Himself by a silent revelation" (ibid., p. 123). Thus, Merton points out that natural contemplation is not only about epistemology, but also implies a metaphysics of the nature of creation.

> The love of Christ hides itself mysteriously in the inner logoi of the created . . . totally and with all His plenitude . . . in all that is varied lies hidden He who is One and eternally identical; in all composite things, He who is simple and without parts; in those which have a beginning, He who has no beginning; in all the visible, He who is invisible. (ibid., p. 124)

> "The Word, {the} Logos, teaches us how the logoi are oriented to Him, how they are both in Him, and for Him. The logoi of things are in the Logos: they are

> created in the Logos. The logoi of things are then the Logos in things. "In every being there is a *logos sophos kai technicos* beyond our vision" (St. Gregory of Nyssa, In Hexaemeron, PG 44.73A). This is the *theoteles logos*: that in the thing which comes from God and goes to God. *Theoria physike* then demands that we enter into the movement of all things from God back to God; and it implies realization of the obstacle in the way of this movement placed in the world by *philautia* and sin, which makes things created by God serve our own immediate interests. (ibid., p. 131)

Therefore, the patristic narrative of "incarnation–divinization" is more clearly developed in Maximus as a metaphysical structure of "creation–recapitulation", so that creaturely being has a symbolic/sacramental nature that points to God.

Merton draws on the "creation–recapitulation" narrative implied in Maximus's natural contemplation to bring out a tapestry of a participatory relationship between creation and the eternal Word of God. The incarnation of the Logos is both the foundation and the culmination of God's creation, through which God is in-and-beyond creaturely being, and through which all creatures are ultimately restored to the mystery of God. Therein, the metaphysical relationship between God and creation is not an externalist static structure, but rather an inner participatory dynamic process that undergoes creation, salvation, and eschaton. The symbolic and sacramental function of creaturely being is not only a unique theological contribution of Maximus, but also a theological vision shared by the ancient Eastern Fathers. Merton concluded the first part of his lectures by following Maximus with the theology of Dionysius the Areopagite. It is worth noting that although historically, Maximus lived at a later time than Dionysius, Merton precedes Maximus' idea of natural contemplation in order to provide a theological context for understanding Dionysius' thought.

For Merton, "symbolic and sacramental theology, which corresponds to *theoria physike*" (ibid., p. 137) in Dionysius is a prerequisite for understanding his mystical theology. Merton further points out that after Dionysius there was a tendency to "go directly from the ascetic life to contemplation without forms, without passing through theoria physike, in the Middle Ages" (ibid., p. 137). It is with this in mind that Merton begins the second part of his discussion on how Dionysius' thought faded from its symbolic theological/natural contemplation context in the medieval West and was received lopsidedly as an individual experience of transcendence. In Merton's view, it is precisely because of the loss of the metaphysical structure of creation–recapitulation presupposed by the natural contemplation that spirituality lost its vision of communion with all creatures and shifted towards a kind of atomic individual practice, gradually becoming a specialized field and differentiating itself from theology. On the other hand, this specialized view of spirituality reinforced the distinction between active contemplation and infused contemplation developed in the Middle Ages, and unwittingly severed the relationship between nature and grace. Therefore, if we want to return to the original unity between theology and spirituality, between active contemplation and infused contemplation, we have to retrieve the theological vision of natural contemplation. As Merton points out, in the contemporary Western Catholic monastic context, the lack of 'natural contemplation' is one of the reasons that "accounts for the stunting of spiritual growth among our monks today" (ibid., p. 121). He said: "We must be restored first of all to this 'natural' contemplation of the cosmos before we can rise to perfect *theologia*" (ibid., p. 125).

By discussing the doctrine of creation implied in Maximus' natural contemplation, Merton articulates the dynamic participatory relationship between God and the created world and breaks through the neo-scholastic anonymous dualism. The created world is the locus of God's action, and there is no such thing as a purely natural order apart from God. God can be known through the created world, and in such experience, we intimate something of the transcendent declared within the immanent with a basic 'in-and-beyond' structure of the analogy of being. God's love and wisdom radiate through all creatures and call them to fulfill their symbolic and sacramental mission in response to Him. The

emphasis in this structure should be on a *dynamic* and *participatory* relationship, in contrast to neo-scholasticism's external two-tiered relationship.

3. Symbolism as an Immanent Analogy: Dynamic Rhythm of Floating Existence

The participatory relationship of the Creator in-and-beyond creation implied in the Christian doctrine of creation is not only a corrective to neo-scholasticism within the Catholic church, but also an antidote to the problems arising from modern secularization. In the 1960s, when the U.S. was embroiled in various conflicts and violence at home and abroad (the arms race in the Cold War, the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement, etc.), modern technological upgrades, instead of helping the world move toward peaceful cohesion, became a powerful leverage for the state to wage war. In the face of these cold facts, Merton had a basic observation: the fundamental problem of our time is one of spirituality; war is merely the outward expression of man's inner spiritual confusion, emptiness, and violence. The roots of all this spiritual chaos lie in the way in which the nature of the world is perceived. In the essay 'Symbolism: Communication or Communion?' (Merton 2013, pp. 240–57) written in 1965, Merton discussed two ways of thinking about reality in the context of modern society, one is the 'symbol–communion' approach and the other is the 'indicative sign–communication' approach. In this regard, Merton attempts to give a diagnosis of the spiritual symptoms of modern society. Merton opens his essay with the following statement:

> In dealing with symbolism one enters an area where reflection, synthesis, and contemplation are more important than investigation, analysis, and science. One cannot apprehend a symbol unless one is able to awaken, in one's own being, the spiritual resonances which respond to the symbol not only as sign but as "sacrament" and "presence" . . . The true symbol does not merely point to some hidden object. It contains in itself a structure which in some way makes us aware of the inner meaning of life and of reality itself. A true symbol takes us to the center of the circle, not to another point on the circumference. A true symbol points to the very heart of all being, not to an incident in the flow of becoming. (ibid., p. 241)

Here Merton points out that the 'symbol' as such rests on the 'in-and-beyond' structure of its nature, i.e., it already contains the ability to point to the spiritual reality. It is understood first and foremost as 'sacrament' and 'presence', as a witness to the real presence of the spiritual reality in space and time. By recognizing and understanding the symbols, one is able to comprehend, approach, and participate in the spiritual reality to which the symbols intrinsically refer. Therefore, "Appreciation of the symbol necessarily implies a certain view of reality itself, a certain cosmology and a religious metaphysic of being, above all a spiritual view of man. Symbols begin to have a living and creative significance only when man is understood to be a sacred being" (ibid., p. 250). Based on this assumption, "Symbolism strives to 'bring together' man, nature, and God in a living and sacred synthesis" (ibid., p. 244). From Merton's discussion, we can find that the principle of transcendental orientation that symbolism bears is apparently predicated on the intrinsic participatory relationship between God and creation in the idea of natural contemplation. In such a relationship, the symbol is not an object for its own sake, which conveys information about another object, but as an object ultimately directed to a subject (ibid., pp. 252–53). The symbol "is a reminder that we are summoned to a deeper spiritual awareness, far beyond the level of subject and object" (ibid.). In this way, "the vital role of the symbol is precisely this: to express and to encourage man's acceptance of his own center, his own ontological roots in a mystery of being that transcends his individual ego" (ibid., p. 248). In Merton's view, the symbolic way of thinking presupposes the vertical participatory structure of transcendental reality and the cosmos. To contemplate a symbol means to incorporate the symbol into the subjective horizon of the transcendental reality and regard the symbol as a reminder pointing to transcendental reality. Thereby, the symbol

and the transcendental reality share a communal character that transcends the subject and object.

In order to better understand the implications of the symbolic mindset, Merton contrasts it with the 'indicative sign'. Merton points out that the function of the 'indicative sign' is the communication of factual or practical knowledge (ibid., p. 242). People can gain information outside the sign by using the "indicative sign", but there is no inherent relationship between the facts referred to and the sign itself. The exclusive epistemological validity of the 'indicative sign' can point to any information and things other than the sign, but without a definite common center and target. The meaning of its reference is arbitrary and comes from social and cultural conventions. Therefore, it only functions as a means of conveyance and communication. In other words, the 'indicative sign' mindset does not presuppose an intrinsic relationship between the universe and a certain spiritual reality. The sign and the referent are in a horizontal relationship between subject and object. Even in religion, if we regard doctrinal theology as mere signs rather than symbols, then they merely convey information about beliefs that are external to oneself. In contrast, "a symbol is, then, not simply an indicative sign conveying information about a religious object, a revelation, a theological truth, a mystery of faith. It is an embodiment of that truth, a 'sacrament'; by which one participates in the religious presence of the saving and illuminating One" (ibid., p. 253).

Having distinguished between the two ways of thinking, Merton is deeply worried about the fact that the symbolic way of knowing is largely disregarded and threatened in modern technological society, which means that people have lost the ability to understand the visible and the invisible as a meaningful unity. What follows is the spiritual degeneration of modern human society. (ibid., pp. 241–42) "Since it is by symbolism that man is spiritually and consciously in contact with his own deepest self, with other men, and with God, then both the 'death of God' and the 'death of man' are to be accounted for by the fact that symbolism is dead" (ibid.). When technology is conflated with civilization, there is no "experience plus", or superabundance[3], beyond the visible technological and material world. However, it is interesting to note that on the one hand, real symbolism has become alien to people, and on the other hand, Merton uses Alfred North Whitehead's point of view to argue that symbolism is an intrinsic structure of human life from which there is no escape (ibid., p. 245). As a result, modern society has produced many corrupted pseudo-symbols in place of real symbolism. Merton refers here to symbols used in politics, the military, and business, such as flags for countries and trademarks for goods. These symbols serve to identify people with a certain thing or situation, but they deprive them of their real identity. In mass societies and mass movements, these pseudo-symbols undoubtedly increase the importance and value of the things they symbolize. In some totalitarian or pathological situations, political symbols can oppress the conscience and darken the mind, leading to a collective of evils (ibid., pp. 243, 247). The desecration of symbols means that there is no longer a specific center. It is as if point A on the circumference of a circle points to B, B points to C, and C points to A, like a circle of references without end, but the common center of points A, B, and C of the circle is forgotten (ibid., p. 255). According to Merton, it is clear that true 'symbolism' is epistemologically primary and first, while the 'indicative sign' is secondary and insufficient. However, in modern society, 'symbolism' has disappeared, leaving the 'indicative sign–communication' approach as the only way to know reality. The result of this is that we no longer have a holistic wisdom of nature and man, and that inherently poetic, philosophical, or even religious superabundance is replaced by the cold and icy things of science, technology, and matter.

Merton also points out that the degeneration of 'symbolism' into 'indicative signs' in the last two or three centuries cannot be attributed exclusively to secularization and atheism. On the contrary, it began with the religions themselves. When religious traditions began to lose their contemplative life and wisdom, 'symbolism' lost its own meaning and ceased to point to the center (ibid., pp. 251, 255). In his essay, Merton proposes a restoration

of the vision of 'symbolism' that is consistent with his appeal in the treatment of the idea of natural contemplation:

> Traditionally, the value of the symbol is precisely in its apparent uselessness as a means of simple communication. Because it is not an efficient mode of communicating information, the symbol can achieve a higher purpose, the purpose of going beyond practicality and purpose, beyond cause and effect. Instead of establishing a new contact by a meeting of minds in the sharing of news, the symbol tells nothing new: it revives our awareness of what we already know, but deepens that awareness. What is "new" in the symbol is the ever new discovery of a new depth and a new actuality in what IS and always has been. . .The function of the symbol is to manifest a union that already exists but is not fully realized. The symbol awakens awareness, or restores it. Therefore, it aims not at communication but at communion. Communion is the awareness of participation in an ontological or religious reality . . . The purpose of the symbol, if it can be said to have a "purpose;' is not to increase the quantity of our knowledge and information but to deepen and enrich the quality of life itself by bringing man into communion with the mysterious sources of vitality and meaning, of creativity, love, and truth, to which he cannot have direct access by means of science and technique. (ibid., pp. 249–50)

The symbol points to a communion based above all on the vertical in-and-beyond structure of analogy of being, in which the symbol is always approaching the source of the mystery, in a perpetual rhythmic movement. In the symbolic view, we live as a 'free-floating existence' (Merton 1975, p. 308) suspended in the middle of an in-and-beyond structure that is always in a state of adventure without dependency on a secure idea given by any social (including religious) system. This suspended state means that the creaturely being, as a symbol, which is an analogue of the (ever) greater and incomprehensible mystery of God, is a rhythmic mystery that cannot be fixed or conceptually grasped.

In the above two sections, we can find that by discussing the structure of the ontological analogy of a creator 'in-and-beyond' creation implied by natural contemplation, as well as the dynamic movement of creation itself towards the transcendent in symbolism, Merton avoids the two metaphysical extremes common to modern society: one regards God as a 'process/activity of becoming' (Merton 1985, pp. 8–9) and then proceeds towards pantheism; one regards God as a static objectified pure Being and then proceeds to onto-theology (which means to objectify or determine the being of God or put God within the creature's grasp). Merton's attempts to steer between the two extremes by recovering the cosmological vision of the participatory relationship between the divine and the creature is also expressed in his last work *Inner Experience: Notes on Contemplation*:

> A certain cultural and spiritual atmosphere favors the secret and spontaneous development of the inner self. The ancient cultural traditions, both of the East and of the West, having a religious and sapiential nature, favored the interior life, indeed transmitted certain common materials in the form of archetypal symbols, liturgical notes, art, poetry, philosophy, and myth, which nourished the inner self from childhood to maturity. . .Unfortunately such a cultural setting no longer exists in the West or is no longer common property. It is something that has to be laboriously recovered by an educated and enlightened minority. (Merton 2003, p. 7)

Whether or not Merton considered himself to be one of an enlightened minority, he did indicate in many of his later lectures and writings an effort to revitalize this ancient Western cultural tradition. The restoration of 'natural contemplation' and sapiential vision, which is aware of the inner participatory relationship between God and creation, were the hidden context of Merton's later thought. This became the theological presupposition and foundation of his engagement in inter-religious dialogue.

4. Metaphysical Intuition as Non-Dualistic Structure of Consciousness: A Religious Dialogue Approach

In his later years, Merton wrote a number of works related to the Zen–Tao, which shows his consistent theological reflection in a different field. In *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (Merton 1968) and *Mystics and the Zen Masters* (Merton 1967), Merton's dialogue with Zen begins with a clarification of the 'misunderstandings' on both sides that results from an unequal comparison of Christianity and Buddhism. Merton points out that the diminished and distorted type of Christian experience is often compared to the Zen experience in its purity, and that this is as meaningless as comparing the Christian philosophy and theology on their highest and most sophisticated level with the myths of a popular and decadent Buddhism (Merton 1968, p. 41). Specifically, Merton criticizes the attempts to compare the pantheistic or onto-theological form of Christianity with Buddhism, which labels Buddhism as 'pantheism', 'quietism', 'Pelagianism', etc. (ibid., p. 35). This kind of unequal comparison often stagnates the dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity, making it difficult to move towards true mutual understanding and transformation. Therefore, Merton elaborates on the respective 'misunderstandings', especially the popular misunderstanding of Zen among Western Christians, and criticizes the two extremes mentioned above (the pantheistic form and the onto-theological form of Christianity), so as to suggest a common ground for religious dialogue. This foundation is a dynamic metaphysical structure based on the transcendent in-and-beyond the immanent, which is embedded in human consciousness.

> Meanwhile, let us remind ourselves that another, metaphysical, consciousness is still available to modern man. It starts not from the thinking and self-aware subject but from Being, ontologically seen to be beyond and prior to the subject–object division. Underlying the subjective experience of the individual self there is an immediate experience of Being. This is totally different from an experience of self-consciousness. It is completely nonobjective. It has in it none of the split and alienation that occurs when the subject becomes aware of itself as a quasi-object. The consciousness of Being is an immediate experience that goes beyond reflexive awareness. It is not 'consciousness of' but pure consciousness, in which the subject as such 'disappears' . . . The metaphysical intuition of Being is an intuition of a *ground of openness*, indeed of a kind of ontological openness and an infinite generosity which communicates itself to everything that is. "The good is diffusive of itself," or "God is love." Openness is not something to be acquired, but a radical gift that has been lost and must be recovered (though it is still in principle 'there' in the roots of our created being). This is more or less metaphysical language, but there is also a non-metaphysical way of stating this. It does not consider God either as Immanent or as Transcendent but as grace and presence, hence neither as a 'Center' imagined somewhere 'out there' nor 'within ourselves.' It encounters him not as Being but as Freedom and Love. I would say from the outset that the important thing is not to *oppose* this gracious and prophetic concept to the metaphysical and mystical idea of union with God, but to show where the two ideas really seek to express the same kind of consciousness or at least to approach it, in varying ways. (ibid., pp. 23–25)

This metaphysics, forgotten by modern Westerners in Merton's view, is the metaphysics of the 'act of Being', i.e., God as pure actuality (Merton 1985, p. 26). This does not compromise God as an 'activity of becoming' (ibid., pp. 8–9), but rather reveals the fact of God's mysterious presence and action in the world, which is an existential action of God's communication and sharing of Himself (ibid., pp. 9–10). In the above passage, Merton attempts to combine metaphysical language with mystical (experiential) language. He repeatedly uses the paradoxical expressions of 'metaphysical intuition', or 'metaphysical experience', or 'transcendent experience' (Merton 1968, p. 71) to refer to the 'act of Being'. He argues that 'metaphysical intuition' does not fundamentally take the human subject as the starting point, nor does it presuppose a metaphysical dichotomy between

the supernatural and the natural, but rather, it takes the divine, or metaphysical Being, as the starting point for the comprehension of everything. That is to say, the world and the human being can only be comprehended in God's participatory action in-and-beyond the creaturely being. All creatures are the result of the presence of divine wisdom, and there is no realm of the world that is separate from God. The world and mankind are by their very nature divine symbols of the presence of the divine. This dynamic metaphysics beyond and prior to the subject–object division corresponds to the non-dual consciousness inherent in human being, which is the very foundation for the arising of subjective consciousness. The pure original consciousness is the state in which a human being opens himself completely to the divine as a symbol in the in-and-beyond structure of analogy of being. This openness or pure consciousness is an innate gift that has been lost and must be recovered. Therefore, 'metaphysical intuition' is in fact the metaphysical Being experiencing Himself in us, or we can say that one is experiencing from 'within Himself' as well as from 'within myself' (ibid., p. 71). Metaphysical intuition requires one to let go of the 'personal ego'/'experiential ego' and ultimately discover the 'transcendent I' within 'Him'. The non-dual dynamic movement of this metaphysical intuition is the concrete practice and expression of the human being as a symbol/sacrament within the structure of God's in-and-beyond creation.

This practice of 'letting go of the empirical self to connect with the transcendent self' reveals a certain analogy between Christianity and Zen in terms of metaphysical intuition. Both Christianity and Zen criticize the approach of seeking the transcendent from the subject ego and claim the experience of the fundamental transformation of the 'empirical ego', in which the 'no-self'/'emptying of the self' becomes the locus of metaphysical intuition. Merton points out that the transcendent experience for the Christian is participation in the 'mind of Christ'. The dynamic process of emptying and transcending the ego is the transformation of the consciousness in Christ, as Christ emptied Himself and became obedient unto death, and therefore God highly exalted Him. This transformation of self is the emptying out of the habit of understanding reality from the perspective of 'ego', so that the light and glory of God, the infinite reality of His presence and love, can be manifested and shine through. In Buddhism, the development of the highest consciousness is likewise the radical emptying of the individual ego to become identified with the enlightened Buddha. Merton points out: "The Zen intuition seeks to awaken a direct metaphysical consciousness beyond empirical, reflecting, knowing, willing and talking ego, this awareness must be immediately present to itself and not mediated by either conceptual or reflexive or imaginative knowledge" (ibid., p. 49). Additionally, Nirvana, often misunderstood in the West as the goal of Zen practice, is "not the consciousness of an ego that is aware of itself as having crossed over to 'the other shore', but the Absolute Ground-Consciousness of Void, in which there are no shores" (ibid., p. 76). However, in Merton's view, Nirvana is not only perfect consciousness but also perfect compassion. It can be regarded as the experience of love, not as an emotion or a feeling, but as the wide openness of Being itself, as well as the realization that pure Being is infinite giving, or that absolute emptiness is absolute compassion (ibid., pp. 79, 84, 86). This compassion is the attempt to heal the fragmentation and the brokenness of illusion, to find wholeness in Nirvana, in the manifestation of Being, in the illumination of prajna/wisdom. Therefore, Nirvana is to be found in the midst of the world around us, not somewhere else, and enlightenment is not to be attained by fleeing from the world, by rejecting it, but by a real understanding of the value of it in the emptying of the self (ibid., pp. 87–88). From Merton's analysis, both Christianity and Buddhism seek to empty the ego and enter into a dynamic state of non-dualistic consciousness. In Christianity, this is based on the manifestation of God in-and-beyond creation structure, in which one experiences transformation back into the original harmonious relationship with God in Christ. In Buddhism, it is to blast out all the preconceptions and to destroy the specious 'reality' in our minds so that everything is illuminated. Therefore, Merton concludes: "the Buddhist enters into the self emptying and enlightenment of Buddha as the Christian enters into the self-emptying (crucifixion) and glorification (resurrection and ascension) of Christ" (ibid., p. 76).

If we understand that both Merton and Suzuki were seeking a 'metaphysical intuition' that transcends the level of 'empirical ego', then the common practice of labeling Buddhism with 'self-power' and Christianity with 'other-power' is no more than a misunderstanding. For such a distinction implies a dualism that separates the transcendent from the world, a mindset that both Buddhism and Christianity wish to transcend. Just as Buddhist enlightenment is the illumination of the wisdom of prajna in the locus of 'no-self' and every moment of meditation is penetrated with the wisdom of prajna, so also the grace of Christ is not only imposed on man from the exterior but permeates within every action of 'emptying of the self'. Thus, at the level of metaphysical intuition, both Buddhism and Christianity engage in the act of Being, and both seek to characterize the rhythmic movement of the suspended middle between the transcendent/'the other shore' and the immanent/'this shore'.

Merton's engagement in religious dialogue is not primarily concerned with horizontal dialogue between religions. He regards religious syncreticism (where the importance of revelation is readily denied) and an exclusivist apologetic mentality (where God's revelation is fixed or objectified to the exclusion of other religions) as two great sins of religious dialogue (Scruggs 2011, p. 412) which arise from the premise of juxtaposing religions horizontally. Merton's engagement in inter-religious dialogue is premised on a dynamic theology of God's in-and-beyond creation, which provides an important foundation for his dialogue; likewise, the aim of inter-religious dialogue is the transformation of the self at the vertical level, that is, a return to the inner depths of one's own tradition through the reminders of the other religions. In Merton's view, inter-religious dialogue can only begin in the context of an inner transformation of the life experience, and it can only go further in the context of a dynamic participatory relationship between God and creation implied in natural contemplation/symbolic theology.

5. Conclusions

From the above discussion we can conclude that Merton's later works demonstrate a consistent concern with recovering a dynamic metaphysics/theology over various discourses. By returning to patristic sources, Merton proposes a participatory and dynamic relationship of the Creator in-and-beyond creation, in which the structure of the analogy of Being implied corrects the dualist tendency of the mainstream neo-scholastic theology of the pre-Vatican II Church. Thereby, he attempts to bridge the split between mysticism and theology in a monastic context and points out that contemplation must be practiced within the cosmic vision of God's creation. In the face of the decline of Catholicism and its influence on the process of secularization, Merton criticizes the 'indicative sign' method of knowing reality in modern society and reaffirms the transcendental significance of the world through the epistemology of symbolism. Based on the structure of analogy and symbolism, Merton points to the created world as a free-floating existence, a state of being that is unfixed but always approaching the transcendent. These have become an important basis for his engagement in inter-religious dialogue. In his dialogue with Zen, Merton attempts to combine the dynamic metaphysical structure with mystical experience and proposes that metaphysical intuition is a non-dualistic consciousness which can be analogical to Zen's highest awareness. Merton's practice of inter-religious dialogue ultimately feeds back into his own tradition. The incarnation and the cross of Christ are by no means merely dogmatic and propositional revelations, nor are they irrelevant stories in modernist theology. Rather, it is an event that gives Christians a new awareness of the relationship between life, others, and the world (Merton 1968, p. 51), which is the foundation for the complete transformation of the self into the divine symbol of Christ.

Merton lived at a time when Catholicism was facing the intellectual, political, and cultural challenges of the modern world, which prompted many theologians to make efforts to respond. Among the many figures and endeavors, Merton was not a brilliant systematic theologian, as Przywara was, who articulated the analogy of being as a metaphysical principle of Catholic thought and engaged in modern philosophy, especially phenomenology, to explain how philosophy and culture intrinsically and ultimately demand a religious answer.

However, Merton is rooted in his own monastic experience, exploring and responding to problems in his monastic context, and regarding himself as a pilgrim always on a journey towards the transcendent.

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Notes

1 In *Ascent to Truth*, Merton's only attempt to write with a neo-scholastic approach, he has a discussion of the relationship between conceptual analogy and contemplation. See (Merton 1951, pp. 67–69).

2 A number of works have been written on the theological characteristic of neo-scholasticism. See (Rowland 2008, 2017; Boersma 2009; McCool 1978, 1989; Hennesey 1988).

3 'Experience plus' and 'superabundane' are mentioned by Merton in his article "Aesthetic and Contemplative Experience". See (Merton 2014, p. 38).

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Article

Balancing the Poles of the Seesaw: The Parallel Paths of Eckhart and Hindu Vedānta toward Oneness with God/Brahman

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Abstract: The ultimate aim of both Eckhart's philosophy and Vedānta philosophy is to attain oneness with God/Brahman. Nevertheless, their different philosophical starting points and the conflict between the sublime ideal of the theory and reality means that their philosophies present a structural symmetry. They both have to face two dilemmas: "How can we claim that humans are already one with God?" and "Why is it that humans are not already one with God?". Eckhart's inherited tradition emphasizes the distinction between humans and God, while the Vedānta philosophical tradition emphasizes that "*I am Brahman*". Each of them starts from one pole of the seesaw of the dilemma and encounters the other's issue at the other pole. Eventually, they converge at the point of balance, with unity with God/Brahman realized in all human activities. Here, this worldly life becomes significant, all human work expresses the Divinity, and the importance of God is replaced by an impersonal Divinity that combines being and nothingness.

Keywords: Vedānta; Brahman; Śaṅkara; Eckhart; theology; comparative philosophy

1. Introduction

There are similarities between Meister Eckhart's philosophy and Vedānta philosophy, as addressed in numerous existing studies. As Milne (1993) suggests, one of the primary reasons for comparing Eckhart with Advaita Vedānta is that non-dualism is not only present in Eastern religious philosophy but also embedded within Western religious philosophy. Non-dualism lies at the very heart of Christianity, in the person of Christ. Although man and God are different, Christ is both God and man. The Church has long struggled to find appropriate ways to articulate the true nature of Christ. Eckhart's philosophy embodies a typical non-dualistic thought, wherein the humanity and Divinity of Christ are not separated. Milne's research primarily focuses on non-duality, asserting that in both Shankara and the works of Eckhart, non-duality is fundamental to the deepest level of religious consciousness. In contrast, we concentrate on the dynamic evolution of non-duality within the philosophies of Eckhart and Vedānta. Evola (1960) notes that Vedānta, Eckhart, and Schelling have the same conception of the Supreme Unity, the Eternal One. All of them consistently oppose theism as the supreme frame of reference. In the case of Eckhart, he emphasized the distinction between God and Divinity, and the "noble soul" must detach itself, break through God, and move forward into the "desert" of the Divinity. Evola considers Vedānta as a metaphysical, esoteric tradition and as transpersonal. We basically agree with him, but the development of the neo-Vedānta has made Vedānta not merely "superpersonal", and it is in this change that we see the structure of symmetry and the eventual convergence between Vedānta and Eckhart's mystical philosophy. Shah-Kazemi (1997) also carefully examines the philosophies of Eckhart and Śaṅkara regarding the two basic philosophical positions of transcendence and immanence. However, these studies primarily compare the similarities in the intricate details of their theories—although these are perhaps the most important details. None of them gives importance

to the neo-Vedānta, whereas the current article gives importance to a kind of symmetrical structure with Eckhart's philosophy that emerges throughout the whole development of Vedānta.

This paper argues that there are structural similarities between Eckhart's philosophy and Vedānta philosophy, beyond merely the generally mentioned similarity of the unity or identity of man and God (Brahman). Both philosophies contain contradictory elements. For example, Eckhart, on the one hand, emphasizes the renunciation of our body and work; on the other hand, he stresses the unity of our physical body with the body of God, this unity with God in secular affairs, and the realization that all things exist within God and that everything in the world is God. On the more academic side, as Siwen (2023) suggests, Eckhart is influenced by the Thomistic tradition on the one hand, which understands God (Gott) as Being and First Cause, and, on the other hand, by neo-Platonism and mysticism, which emphasizes a more fundamental "Divinity" (Gottheit, Godhead) as nothing, as well as the unground, which is distinct from God. God and Divinity are neither identifiable nor distinguishable in this tension, as the absolute one and nothing. Vedānta philosophy similarly presents two contradictory ideas: one considers the world as impermanent and full of sufferings and thereby promotes the renunciation of the world to attain liberation, while the other views all as the Absolute (Brahman), with the entire world being the Absolute, and thereby advocates unity with the Brahman in all activities, including work, life, and even breathing. Similar to Eckhart's distinction between God and Divinity, there is a distinction in Indian philosophy between Brahmā, one of the major personality gods of Hinduism, and Brahman, the divinity that is immanent in and transcends all; however, Vedānta is not concerned with Brahmā. The apparent contradiction above suggests that both philosophies are not merely static theories; instead, each represents a trajectory of theoretical development, thus containing theoretical tension. Therefore, it is reasonable to compare Eckhart's philosophy with the long tradition of Vedānta philosophy.

We know that both philosophies emphasize the identity of humans and God/Brahman, and they both ultimately stress the importance of this worldly life. However, their starting points and theoretical trajectories differ. It is clear that any philosophy rejecting transcendence and emphasizing identity and immanence has to face a dilemma due to the limited horizon of this worldly life: "How can we claim that humans (living in this finite world) are already one with God?" (issue A) and "Why is it that humans are not already one with God (so we are still living in this finite world)?" (issue B). These two issues are like two poles of a seesaw, with different presuppositions. Eckhart's philosophy and Vedānta philosophy originated at one pole of the seesaw, and as they developed, they slid to the other pole of the seesaw and eventually balanced themselves. Eckhart's philosophy constantly teaches people how to seek God[1]; in a theory that looks to God from the perspective of this worldly life, his presupposition is: "How can we claim that humans are already one with God?" Vedānta philosophy begins with the Upanishadic statement that "*I am Brahman*", thereby facing the experiential world filled with sufferings; it starts with the question: "Why is it that humans are not already one with God?"

To better present the symmetrical structure of this seesaw, this paper divides each of these two philosophies into three stages. However, note that this distinction of stages does not begin with the latter stage canceling out and replacing the former; they always coexist in tension. In Eckhart's philosophy, these three stages are: (1) the human–God difference and the difference between God and the Divinity; (2) becoming one with God through self-emptying and the Divinity in the depths of God; (3) becoming one with God in Being and the God–Divinity relationship is without identity or distinction. For Eckhart, there are four stages to the union between the soul and God: dissimilarity, similarity, identity, and breakthrough (Schürmann 2023). Here, the second and third stages merged into the middle stage, according to our way of division. From stages 1 to 2 and 3, Eckhart deals first with issue B and then issue A. Yet, since Vedānta philosophy is derived from the *Upaniṣads*, which emphasize the immanence of ritual, it begins with an emphasis on "*I am Brahman*", and the significance of Brahmā is eliminated at the outset. Corresponding to

this, approach, Eckhart's philosophy deconstructs the significance of God and transfers it to an impersonal Divinity in stage 2. In Vedānta philosophy, the three stages are: (1) "*I am Brahman*"; (2) *Māyā* is the obstacle to our unity with Brahman; (3) everything is Brahman. In stage 1, Vedānta philosophy is faced with issue A. For this reason, Śaṅkara regards the ego, representing this world, as being false, which brings Vedānta philosophy to stage 2 and encounters issue B. In this article, we depict Eckhart's philosophy in Section 2 and Vedānta philosophy in Section 3 and show how both move toward balance in Section 4.

2. Eckhart: From Human–God Difference to Oneness with God

Eckhart is a devout lover of God, adhering to the creed that God is not a creature but is purely creating. It is in this sense that a series of Eckhart's theological theories are integrated. Based on it, his primary approach is what is termed speculative theology. The term "speculative" here is not dialectic but makes philosophy a method: philosophy is the love of wisdom (philo-sophia) and not the possession of wisdom. Thus, speculative theology means to love God in both a religious way and in the way of loving wisdom. This is the profound love we read of in Eckhart's philosophy, where he trusts God unconditionally and requires us to do the same. It was based on this love that he developed the philosophy of detachment.

The fundamental intuition and standpoint of Eckhart's philosophy lies in the belief that God is not a creature like human beings but instead is creating and is even Love itself. It is in this sense that Eckhart distinguishes between God (Gott) and Divinity (Gottheit, Godhead), in which divinity "is superior to being and is unnameable, naked simplicity" (Evola 1960), and God remains personified. Eckhart (1957, p. 278) argues that "there is nothing prior to being because that which confers being creates and is a creator. To create is to give being out of nothing. It is a fact that all things have being from being itself, just as all things are white from whiteness itself. Therefore, if being is different from God, the creator will be something other than God". In this sense, it can be said that being is equivalent to God, who is the Creator, and that the creating itself is nothing, that is, Divinity, and man is the creature. Although we liken the divine to creating itself, it is, like Aristotle's "entelecheia", the immovable driver. In Eckhart, the "nothing" of Divinity is the ground without ground that is behind all creating. Although this doctrinal distinction exists, for the sake of the sermon, Eckhart's use of the word "God" often carries the dual identity of creating and creator, nothing and being—and this is easy to understand. On the one hand, God and man are equal, while creating is total silence; it is nothing, it does not even act. On the other hand, in the case of the creature, the creator is often regarded as a synonym for creating itself. Therefore, "God becomes and unbecomes … God works, the Godhead does no work: there is nothing for it to do, there is no activity in it. It never peeped at any work" (Eckhart 2009, pp. 293–94). Similarly, Eckhart emphasizes that "being is God" (Eckhart 1957, p. 278), rather than "God is being", because it represents both "being" and "nothing".

Since the word "God" has two meanings, the relationship between humans and God is always influenced by the relationship between God and Divinity. Although we always speak of a "human–God relationship", "God" has both transcendent and immanent, being and nothingness dimensions. The complex relationship between God and Divinity is expressed in the phrase "the God beyond God" (cf. McGinn 1981). Since the word "God" has two meanings, the relationship between humans and God is always influenced by the relationship between God and Divinity. Although we always speak of a "human–God relationship", "God" has dimensions that are both transcendent and immanent, being and nothingness. The complex relationship between God and Divinity is expressed in the phrase "the God beyond God" (cf. McGinn 1981). The difference between man and God that is emphasized in this section is fundamentally the difference between God and Divinity, and this is issue B with which Eckhart is faced; for this reason, the solution seems to be that the depths of God are Divinity, and, thus, the solution to the union of man with God is embodied in the separation of being and self-emptying, which brings Eckhart back

to issue A. This specialness of God is also an issue that must be broken through; only then can true detachment and freedom be attained. In Section 4, we will talk about the way Eckhart moves from the pole of the seesaw with issue A to the point of balance.

A contradiction seems to arise when we contemplate how to approach God—if humans can pursue God on their own initiative, does this imply that humans and God are separate and independent entities? Therefore, Eckhart (2009, p. 414) asserts that the essence of creatures is nothingness and God brought them into existence. If man wants to pursue God, he has to make God pursue him by bearing his inherent nothingness, which means rejecting the body and the works of the ego. However, since everything is God's creation from nothingness, the body and the works of the ego are no exception. Therefore, Miles (2005, p. 194) said of Eckhart that "he sometimes said that body, intellect, and works are to be totally rejected; in other passages, all of these seem to be affirmed". Eckhart's line of thought always presents its various logical stages simultaneously, especially in his sermons. His ideas manifest as a dynamic developmental process, preserving the tension between the love of God and the love of wisdom. In contrast to the gradual transitions in Vedānta philosophy over an extended historical period, the tension in Eckhart's philosophy is not a temporal transition but rather an intrinsic tension within his philosophy. In today's terms, his thinking contains six closely linked and even mutually inclusive logical segments: God is not created, God is different from humans (creatures), humans approach God through detachment/God comes to humans through detachment, oneness with God, the omnipresence or immanence of God, and how humans should live based on these.

In his view of body and soul opposition, Eckhart was influenced by the theological tradition—at least by the Neoplatonism and Augustinian approaches that were prevalent in his time. In similar views, the body is seen as a burden for the soul, hindering the path to God. Even if Eckhart did not fully accept the notion of the body as a burden, he nevertheless acknowledged the existence of obstructions and impediments to a certain extent; he "…cuts away the chips that had hidden and concealed the image: he gives nothing to the wood but takes from it, cutting away the overlay and removing the dross" (Eckhart 2009, p. 560).

In Augustine's view, to avoid obstruction, one should seek truth inwardly. This is similar to the transition found in Indian philosophy from external sacrifice to internal sacrifice. However, the problem lies in the fact that the internal still exists relative to the external, and claiming to seek God within humans almost implies that humans are some independent and sufficient entity. In Eckhart's case, on the other hand, the situation is quite different. If God is purely creating and all creatures lie in God, then humans as creatures cannot inherently possess themselves. Humans are utter nothingness, where "all creatures are pure nothing. I do not say they are a trifle or they are anything: they are pure nothing … If God turned away for an instant from all creatures, they would perish" (Eckhart 2009, p. 226). God is who He is without any specific form. In his different view of creatures and of God, Eckhart does not focus on the ordinariness, materiality, and problem of evil in humans as theologians before him did. He does not belittle humans relative to the supreme God but instead elevates God even higher, placing Him thoroughly on the level of non-creature. He even says, "He is one and indivisible, without mode or properties: in that sense, He is neither Father, Son, nor Holy Ghost, and yet is a Something which is neither this nor that" (Eckhart 2009, p. 81). All creatures are created out of nothingness. In Sermon 19, Eckhart (2009, pp. 137–38) elaborates on the four meanings of the phrase: "Paul rose from the ground and with open eyes saw nothing", creatively interpreting the nothingness of everything as God's seeing.

Humans are creatures, which means that humans do not possess themselves in essence; they are utter nothingness. Nevertheless, along the path of nothingness, humans can also return to God. This is because the way in which humans seek God differs from the way that they seek other creatures. The pursuit of God by humans is to allow God to approach them. All of this is part of Eckhart's theory of self-emptying. This absolute self-emptying can "force" God to fill the vacuum in the soul (Vinzent 2011, p. 222). It is important to note

that the theory of self-emptying is a methodology that always serves the pursuit of God. In Blakney's translation, he quotes the following passage:

> *Someone complained to Meister Eckhart that no one could understand his sermons. Whereupon he said: "To understand my preaching, five things are needed. The hearer must have conquered strife; he must be contemplating his highest good; he must be satisfied to do God's bidding; he must be a beginner among beginners; and, denying himself, he must be so a master of himself as to be incapable of anger".* (Eckhart 1957, p. 93)

The most important of these five things seems to be the necessity to "be a beginner among beginners", an expression synonymous with "emptying oneself", i.e., accepting one's ignorance rather than asserting knowledge. This is the practice of self-emptying, which is precisely the way to reach God. Denying oneself and avoiding anger are means to this end. However, one must also "contemplate his highest good", for everything that remains after the ego is discarded comes from God and is the good of God. This good represents how a connection with God is established, and to "be satisfied to do God's bidding" is both within this means and is an end in itself. Ultimately, one conquers the strife between ego and God and remains a beginner who follows God's bidding. As Eckhart (2009, p. 518) often expressed, "For the more we possess of things, the less we possess of Him, and the less love we have of things, the more we have of Him with all that He can do".

The obstacle to the soul is the soul itself. Even for the very devout, if their pious souls always care about pursuing God for themselves, they will never be able to touch God, and even the very devout will never be able to reach God if their pious souls are always concerned with pursuing God for their own benefit (Vinzent 2011, pp. 60–61). In order to pursue God, one has to accept all of God. It is a delusion to think that one can accept God's grace on the one hand while still retaining the ego on the other. "God must give me Himself for my own as He is His own, or I shall get nothing, and nothing will be to my taste. Whoever shall thus receive Him outright must have wholly renounced himself" (Eckhart 2009, pp. 226–27). The creature is characterized by nothingness, which is both the drawback that makes the creature different from God and the key to the creature's ability to be one with God. At this stage of logic, therefore, Eckhart criticizes works on the ego level. The works he criticizes are those performed for oneself rather than for God, treating works as ends rather than means.

Self-emptying represents a journey away from the self toward complete de-object ification. Even an objectified concept of God is no longer pursued in this state. It is only then that God truly arrives. As Eckhart said:

> *If a man turns away from self and from all created things, then … you will attain to oneness and blessedness in your soul's spark,9 which time and place never touched. This spark is opposed to all creatures: it wants nothing but God, naked, just as He is. It is not satisfied with the Father or the Son or the Holy Ghost, or all three Persons so far as they preserve their several properties … it seeks to know whence this being comes, it wants to get into its simple ground, into the silent desert into which no distinction ever peeped, of Father, Son or Holy Ghost … this ground is an impartible stillness, motionless in itself, and by this immobility all things are moved, and all those receive life that live of themselves, being endowed with reason.* (Eckhart 2009, pp. 310–11)

This suggests that in order to deal with issue B, Eckhart believes that we need to turn away from all creatures and all beings. Furthermore, the God that man attains in this state is not the Father or the Son or the Holy Ghost, but the Divinity. In this case, the Divinity is in the depths of God[2], and the two are different. "God and Godhead are as different as heaven and earth. I say further: the inner and the outer man are as different as heaven and earth" (Eckhart 2009, p. 293). Reaching oneness with God through complete self-emptying seems too difficult and idealistic to be possible. Can living beings actually reach God? Or is it true that only by dying can one reach nirvana, as the primitive Buddhists believed? This means that Eckhart has to deal with issue A.

In oneness with God (Divinity), "we should be turned into Him and become fully united with Him, so that His own becomes ours, and ours all becomes His: our heart and His one heart and our body and His one body" (Eckhart 2009, p. 509). We will discuss this in detail in Section 4, while here we would like to briefly mention that not only the soul but also the body, which is traditionally regarded as impure and burdensome, can be one with God. On this point, he differs from previous theologians. He not only talks about how all things show the greatness of the Creator but also emphasizes the importance of creatures for God: "For before there were creatures, God was not 'God': He was That which He was. But when creatures came into existence and received their created being, then God was not 'God' in Himself, He was 'God' in creatures" (Eckhart 2009, p. 421). God is born in humans, and humans are born in God (Eckhart 2009, p. 92). Note that God does not depend on creatures and is not only realized in creatures—this is perhaps the most significant difference between Eckhart's and Spinoza's philosophy; God (Divinity) is still beyond the creature. Although Eckhart did not accept the overflow theory, he did not wholly move towards a Spinoza-style philosophy. Vedānta philosophy precisely echoes this point with him—everything is Brahman, but Brahman is not solely all these things.

3. Vedānta: From "*I Am Brahman*" to "*Māyā*"

Vedānta is a significant branch of traditional Indian philosophy that remains active both in India and worldwide today. The literal meaning of Vedānta is the end of the Vedas. However, the end of the Vedas does not mean the end of or disappearance of the Vedas but is, rather, a summation and development. The Vedic texts can be broadly categorized into four groups—the Samhitas, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, and Upaniṣads. The Samhitas consist mainly of hymns dedicated to the gods; the Brāhmaṇas explain the complex rituals based on the Vedas and interpret the mystical content of these ceremonies; the Āraṇyakas are books on hermitage in the forest; and the Upaniṣads are philosophical contemplations of the real, the source of the universe, and the nature of man. These classics "may be roughly characterized as the successive utterances of poets, priests, and philosophers" (Hume 1921, p. 5). According to Georg Feuerstein (2008, pp. 240–93), progressing from the Samhitas to the Brāhmaṇas, the standardization of Vedic rituals was completed. The Brāhmaṇas are texts used for Brahmanic rituals, describing their origins, meanings, and benefits. Later, the Āraṇyakas refer to the knowledge that was imparted in the forest. Due to the lack of resources for performing rituals in the forest, these ritual activities gradually shifted from physical practice to imaginative contemplation. By the time of the Upaniṣads, some practitioners transitioned from conducting sacrifices in meditation to purely philosophical contemplation. For instance, as is written in the Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad:

> *The Brahma-students say: Is Brahman the cause? Whence are we born? Whereby do we live, and whither do we go? O ye who know Brahman, tell us at whose command we abide, whether in pain or in pleasure. Should time, or nature, or necessity, or chance, or the elements be considered as the cause, or he who is called the Purusha?* (Muller 1884, pp. 231–32)

The characteristic of this evolution from Brāhmaṇa to Upaniṣad is that specific ritual ceremonies that are performed for the sake of gaining benefits turn gradually into imagining the process of sacrifices in the mind, then turn into contemplating the symbols and metaphors of ritual ceremonies, and finally turn entirely into philosophical thinking. In other words, it is a transition from an external, formalized natural religion to a spiritual religion with true inwardness and transcendence. Radhakrishnan (1953, p. 8) describes the importance of the Upaniṣads for religious rituals as follows: "The Upaniṣads, which base their affirmations on spiritual experience, are invaluable for us as the traditional props of faith, the infallible scripture, miracle and prophecy are no longer available".

The core concept of the Upaniṣads is "aham brahmāsmi" (I am Brahman). The Bṛhadār aṇyaka Upaniṣad (Mādhavānanda 1950, p. 92) states, "In the beginning, this (universe) was but the self (Viraj) of a human form. He reflected and found nothing else but himself. He first uttered, 'I am he.' Therefore he was called Aham (I)". This means that the essence

or true self of man is Brahman. In any religion, especially a theistic one, it is considered appalling to claim that the essence of man is the same as Brahman/God.[3] Although the Upaniṣads belong to the orthodox Vedic religion, we can imagine how the Vedic sacrificial clergy would have resented the claim that "I am Brahman", which suggests that to achieve liberation, one need not rely on the external, cumbersome Vedic sacrificial rituals or personal gods. Instead, liberation can be attained through the inward contemplation of one's own intrinsic nature. We must note that Hinduism encompasses both transcendent personal deities, as depicted in the Vedic scriptures, and a metaphysical impersonal deity, as represented by Vedānta. Therefore, a brief explanation of them is necessary. Brahmā, Vishnu, and Shiva are primary deities; they all have temples, idols, incarnations, legends, and many followers. Strictly speaking, they are not the purest existences in philosophy. Furthermore, the Upanishads say, "I am Brahman", not "I am Brahma", and also state, "Thou art Brahma, thou art Vishnu, thou art Rudra (Shiva), thou art Agni, Varuna, Vayu, Indra, thou art All" (Hume 1921, pp. 422–24). Without a doubt, India's theistic tradition is extensive and sophisticated, with a broad spectrum of tantric practices. Nonetheless, the Vedānta, which this paper discusses, typically gravitates more toward metaphysical discourse and the investigation of an impersonal deity.

From the Samhita to the Upaniṣads, the Vedic religion undergoes a complete transition from external worship to internal spiritual worship. G.C. Pande (1999, p. 603) tells us that the statement "I am Brahman" marks the conclusion of India's lengthy inquiry into absolute existence. However, this conclusion is also the starting point for all subsequent discussions within the Vedānta schools. The Brahman found in the Upaniṣads is the supreme God, the supreme existence, and the supreme Self. It transforms Itself to generate the world and the true Self (ātman) of humans. It not only penetrates all things as an inner essence but also includes all things within itself as an indivisible One. The essence of the world is Brahman, and everything is Brahman. The Upaniṣads have dominated the philosophy, religion, and life of Indians for three thousand years. As Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1953, p. 17) says, "Every subsequent religious movement has had to show itself to be in accord with their philosophical statements … They have survived many changes, religious and secular, and helped many generations of men to formulate their views on the chief problems of life and existence".

If everything is Brahman, and our essence is Brahman ("I am Brahman"), why is it that both I and this world are limited and imperfect? This is a question that Vedānta philosophers are inevitably confronted with. Dr. B.N.K. Sharma (1986, p. 12) believes that the key to solving this problem lies in managing the relationship between "the thinking self, a world of external realities, and indications of an Infinite Power rising above them". Different answers to this problem have formed different schools of Vedānta. The three main schools are Advaita Vedānta, as represented by Gaudapāda and Śaṅkara, the Viśiṣṭā Advaita of Rāmānuja, and the Dvaita of Madhva. Before explaining the first school, let us briefly introduce the last two. The term Viśiṣṭā Advaita means "qualified non-duality". It asserts that Brahman (the ultimate reality), the individual self, and the phenomenal world composed of matter all truly exist. The individual self and the world are expressions of Brahman's attributes, and the reality of the individual self and the world limits Brahman. It is clear that the problem with Viśiṣṭā Advaita is that, as the origin of the world, Brahman has attributes and it is limited by these attributes, which negates the absoluteness of Brahman. The term Dvaita means "dualism". Madhva attests that there is no absolute inseparability between God and the world, as well as between God and the self. He opposes the view that considers the world and the self as the essential nature of God. According to Jeaneane D. Fowler (2002, p. 342), the philosophical school holds a distinct dualistic perspective on reality, asserting that the temporal and the divine are separate.

Gaudapāda is the founder of Advaita Vedānta, and Māyā represents his theory for dealing with the relationship between the self, the world, and God (Brahman). He believes that both subjective and objective things are illusory. What is Māyā? According to him, "That which is non-existent at the beginning and in the end is necessarily so (non-existent)

in the middle" (Nikhilānand 1949, p. 97). Swāmi Nikhilānand (1949, pp. xii) interprets that according to Gaudapād, illusory objects do not exist at the beginning and the end; they are all non-eternal, non-real, and, furthermore, are ultimately subject to decay and death. However, Māyā is not the nihilism of Western philosophy, for behind Māyā there is Brahman, the ultimate reality. Gaudapād believes that everything that people experience is nothing but the non-dual Brahman. The perception of duality arises due to our ignorance, as we are unaware of the true nature of the Absolute, which is the non-dual Brahman. In short, he asserts that Brahman and the essence of man (the self) are one, and the world is only an unreal illusion of Brahman.

Śaṅkara is the most crucial philosopher of Advaita Vedānta. He inherits the ideas of Gaudapāda and makes significant developments based on them. Similarly, Śaṅkara also believes that Brahman is the origin of the world. However, he develops two concepts: Brahman with qualities (Saguṇa Brahman) and Brahman without qualities (Nirguṇa Brahman). According to Monier-Williams (2022), Guṇa means "quality, peculiarity, attribute, or property". Saguṇa Brahman refers to Brahman with qualities, while Nirguṇa Brahman refers to Brahman without qualities. Therefore, regarding the epistemology, there is a lower level of knowledge (Aparā Vidyā), which corresponds to Saguṇa Brahman, and supreme knowledge (Parā Vidyā), which corresponds to Nirguṇa Brahman. As Saguṇa Brahman, it is the source of the universe, such as God, that ordinary people can understand and imagine. As Nirguṇa Brahman, it transcends the entire experiential world and the real world. It is the ultimate reality and eternal existence, but ordinary people cannot understand the existence of the supreme Brahman. Only through the continuous search for knowledge of Brahman can one have insight into the Nirguṇa Brahman. In Gaudapāda's view, human experience is only a creation of Brahman, so the world is only an illusion (Māyā). But, in Śaṅkara's view, Brahman has a power called Māyā. Jeaneane D. Fowler (2002, p. 246) explains that according to Śaṅkara, we live in a world of illusory phenomena to which we give names and to which we cling in the belief that they are real. Māyā projects and produces the world that people experience, but, at the same time, it also veils us, preventing us from recognizing the Brahman behind the experiential world.

We can see that the philosophical starting points of Eckhart and Vedānta are different. Eckhart starts from the basis of the difference between man and God (the opposition of flesh and spirit) and explains why man is one with God; Vedānta starts with "I am Brahman" and explains why I and the world do not manifest as perfect Brahman. We can regard this as a diagnosis: firstly, the essence of a person is Brahman, so the healthy (ideal) state of a person should mirror that of Brahman—being eternal and joyful. However, in reality, people and the external world are constantly subject to change and are ultimately destined to decay and die. Vedānta philosophy believes that the cause of disease is human ignorance, i.e., being veiled by Māyā, not seeing Brahman behind the experiential world, and not realizing that the experiential world is also unreal. The method of curing this disease is "vichāra", which means discrimination. It is the faculty of discrimination that distinguishes the real, Brahman, from the unreal. That is, we must shed the things in this world that belong to us. As Śaṅkara (Mādhavānanda 1921, p. 33) says, this gross body is to be deprecated, for it consists of the skin, flesh, blood, arteries and veins, fat, marrow, and bones, and is full of other offensive things. However, we soon discover the paradox of it, namely, that although "I am Brahman", Brahman is so different from the self as an individual, "like the sun and a glowworm, the king and a servant, the ocean and a well, or Mount Meru and an atom" (Mādhavānanda 1921, p. 108). Brahman is within everything and yet transcends everything, "that beyond which there is nothing; which shines even above Māya, which again is superior to its effect, the universe; the inmost Self of all" (Mādhavānanda 1921, p. 119). Within the principle that everything is Brahman, how can we reconcile the contradiction between real and unreal, immanence and transcendence, One and diversity? As can be seen, although Eckhart and Vedānta start from different poles of the seesaw, they both want to find a theoretical balance. The issue with which the philosophy of Vedānta is concerned at the present stage is this: if man and God are the same,

why are humans not already one with God (so that we are still living in this finite world)? Eckhart approaches this issue from a different perspective and he deals with it in the next theoretical stage because of his different starting points. Nevertheless, they will eventually realize that seeking balance without going to the opposite end of the seesaw means acknowledging that there is no difference between humans and God. It requires removing human specificity and ego for humans to act as though "all is Brahman/God."

4. Balance of Theories and the Revival of Works

If we only emphasize oneness with God and "I am Brahman" by excluding something, we still treat God/Brahman as the supreme object, failing to make it wholly univocal and immanent. It only reveals the union of humans and God based on the difference between God and the Divinity. Here, the detachment is revealed in a more fundamental way. For Eckhart and in Vedānta philosophy, the dilemmas between "Why is it that humans are not already one with God?", and "How can we claim that humans are already one with God?" have not been properly resolved. In the previous discussion, Eckhart explained how humans are already one with God, while Vedānta philosophy explained why humans have not yet actualized oneness with God. Each has moved to the other pole of the seesaw, and, thus, both need to return to find the balance. The limitation of the theory at this stage is that, whether considering Eckhart's or Vedānta philosophy, they both pay attention to God while overlooking everything in this worldly life. The balance of the seesaw, however, lies in the importance of all creatures being one with God and the importance of work in this world.

As pure creating and pure love, God (as Divinity) can be loved by humans in the same way that God loves humans, even though humans lack the ability to create. To love is to give completely, without any reservations for oneself—this inherently implies detachment. "But divine love takes us into itself, and we are one with it … thus all creatures are maintained in existence by love, which is God" (Eckhart 2009, p. 63). On the one hand, all creatures exist because of love, and love is synonymous with God; on the other hand, we, the creatures of God's love, pursue God, precisely through love. God is love, and we aspire to God through love; love can only aspire to God, and only love can aspire to God.[4] Through self-emptying, love, and detachment, we gradually journey toward oneness with God. Detachment is the complete manifestation of self-emptying, and love also means giving entirely without reservation. Whether self-emptying or love, they are all subsumed under the fundamental yet complex concept of detachment[5]. Eckhart believes:

> *This immovable detachment brings a man into the greatest likeness to God. For the reason why God is God is because of His immovable detachment, and from this detachment He has His purity, His simplicity, and His immutability. Therefore, if a man is to be like God, as far as a creature can have likeness with God, this must come from detachment. This draws a man into purity, and from purity into simplicity, and from simplicity into immutability, and these things make a likeness between God and that man; and this likeness must occur through grace, for grace draws a man away from all temporal things and purges him of all that is transient.* (Eckhart 2009, p. 569)

Detachment, on the one hand, refers to humans' detachment (completely giving of oneself and moving toward God) and, on the other hand, God's detachment (completely giving of Himself and moving toward people). In the absolute detachment of God, we see the divinity, and detachment is a manifestation of love for God, which means to love God with philosophical love. Furthermore, detachment goes beyond loving God. Even the subject of loving God is effaced, leaving only pure love, the Divinity. "You should love Him as He is: a non-God, a non-spirit, a non-person, a non-image; rather, as He is a sheer pure limpid One, detached from all duality" (Eckhart 2009, p. 465). This also means that with detachment, one no longer needs to grovel or even exhibit humility before God— humility still retains the self or ego, while detachment is in oneself but means forgetting oneself.[6] "That sounds strange, that man can become God in love, but so it is true in the eternal truth,

and our Lord Jesus Christ possesses it" (Eckhart 2009, p. 105). If self-emptying is analogous to humility, starting from the basis of self or ego and continuously lowering oneself permanently preserves the basis of self. While detachment no longer demands an ego, it no longer generates any demands and desires from the ego, thus entering into oneness with God with complete simplicity. Humility is obedience to transcendence and detachment to immanence. The grace that is given by God is nothing less than God Himself.

For Eckhart, the concept of detachment does not merely remain at the level of self-emptying or should be treated solely as a methodological approach. It must evolve into an ontological perspective to radicalize the theory. Notions assuming that there are hindrances and absolute evil are not radical enough. For instance, when discussing the abandonment of the ego, Eckhart cited the following examples: "It is in the darkness that one finds this light" (Eckhart 2009, p. 410) and "What is a pure heart? That is pure which is separated and parted from all creatures, for all creatures produce impurity because they are nothing, and nothing is a lack and tarnishes the soul" (Eckhart 2009, p. 105). This precisely moves the discourse from the issue of "How can we claim that humans are already one with God?" to its antithesis, "Why is it that humans have not already actualized their oneness with God?", i.e., why are we still in darkness and stained if all creatures are of God? The issue is faced at the starting point of Vedānta philosophy, as described in the previous section. Vedānta philosophy has similarly slipped from one pole of the seesaw to the other, facing up to Eckhart's philosophy at the starting point.

The body represents Eckhart's theoretical breakthrough. In previous stages of the theory, the body and soul were often opposed (Eckhart 2009, p. 59), but now, "my body is more in my soul than my soul is in my body, but both body and soul are more in God than they are in themselves" (Eckhart 2009, p. 334). In Eckhart's view, both the body and the soul are creatures that have a direct relationship with Divinity first, and with each other second. Eckhart negates the Platonic approach of hierarchically ordering God, soul, and body. He denies any intermediaries to God since any intermediary, by analogy, sees God as created.

In this unity with God, the body and soul fit together. As Eckhart notes, this is precisely the way to love each other through the love of God (see Eckhart 2009, p. 101, for more detail). If such love is genuinely equal, it should regard all God's creatures equally, including the body and soul. If the soul (excluding the ego) is where God manifests, then the body must also be where God resides. The saying "He was 'God' in creatures" (Eckhart 2009, p. 421) already indicates that God (Divinity), by creating itself, omnipotently unifies all creatures. No creature does not exist and act in and for the sake of Divinity. While the Divinity does not become something, it remains quiet and is nothing. Only then can all beings come equally from the Divine. The relationship of God and Divinity is without identity or distinction in this stage. This is why Eckhart said that "God becomes and unbecomes" (Eckhart 2009, p. 293) and that "God works, the Godhead does no work" (Eckhart 2009, p. 294).

At this point, the personified God is dissolved in man's relationship with Divinity (although it is still called God). "When I return to God, if I do not remain there, my breakthrough will be far nobler than my outflowing" (Eckhart 2009, p. 294). Just as in Śaṅkara, Brahman appears in "I", with Māyā removed. We have to give up everything, even detachment from God, for Divinity is undoubtedly both univocal and absolutely quiet, a synthesis of being and nothingness. Pure nothing means absolute detachment. At this stage, the so-called appearances, obscurations, and stains do not accurately describe the facts, much like the development of Vedānta philosophy, which also began to emphasize that there is no need to leave the world for liberation. The truth is that once we become one with God/Brahman (which means Divinity from now on), we will acquire a univocal vision, seeing everything in the world as God/Brahman. Eckhart said:

> *I am often asked if a man can reach the point where he is no longer hindered by time, multiplicity, or matter. Assuredly! Once this birth has really occurred, no creatures can hinder you; instead, they will all direct you to God and this birth … In fact, what used*

> *to be a hindrance now helps you most. Your face is so fully turned toward this birth that, no matter what you see or hear, you can get nothing but this birth from all things. All things become simply God to you, for in all things you notice only God, just as a man who stares long at the sun sees the sun in whatever he afterward looks at. If this is lacking, this looking for and seeking God in all and sundry, then you lack this birth.* (Eckhart 2009, p. 59)

Eckhart lived at a time when most mystics and theologians believed that one had to renounce the things of this world in order to reach God (Miles 2005, p. 198). Eckhart also shared this view, considering it part of the theoretical stage of self-emptying. However, at this stage, he now recognizes that everything points to God, and what were once considered obstructions and stains have turned into signposts on the way to seeking the Divinity that is beyond time and space, with the body and its works being returned together. Similarly, Vedānta philosophy has also undergone a process of rejection and reclaiming works, shifting from external ritual to internal worship and then to contemporary works. When all paths are seen as leading to God, how should one act? Eckhart argued that if a person does not yet have the absence of the need for action and forces himself to empty all concepts and refrain from action, then he should still act (work). We must align our external actions with our inner intentions, being driven by a sense of destiny rather than working aimlessly. In this way, "one is co-operating with God" (Eckhart 2009, p. 517), which means that everything comes from the Divinity who does no work directly. Nothing is evil; the path to God originally had no obstacles, and people reached God through various works. These works were initially good but became obstacles when the people's desires were for the works and actions rather than for God, which is the purpose of works (Vinzent 2011, p. 155). For example, a title that is given according to ability is good, but its pursuit will lead us astray if a title itself becomes the object of that pursuit.

Eckhart sometimes emphasized that we are to seek God in many ways and also sometimes singly: "God has not bound man's salvation to any special mode … We should have more regard to other people's way, when they have true devotion, and not scorn anybody's way" (Eckhart 2009, p. 505). Furthermore, "a man must always do one thing, he cannot do everything. It must always be one thing, and, in that one, one should take everything" (Eckhart 2009, p. 515). Whether it is a matter of multiple ways or one way, we should consider them together, as what Eckhart wants to emphasize is that this is the same thing. We should experience the omnipresence of God and understand that there is not just one path to God and that we cannot just worship God in the church and then forget about him outside the church. Nevertheless, one should also sway like a floating weed but trust in God, accept the path that God has given, and then go deep into it to realize God. That is the way, from one to all. A believer in God should not be obsessed with God but should experience God in his own life. He need not cultivate a love of God specifically but should realize that his love of something is always already the love of God, the way to God. "By observing whatever you are most inclined to or ready for: concentrate on that and observe yourself closely" (Eckhart 2009, p. 506). The same idea also appears in the neo-Vedānta of Vivekānanda and Aurobindo. The path to liberation is not only the wisdom yoga of Sankara. In Karma (act or work) Yoga, all works are seen as the path to liberation, wherein one must act without attachment to the results of the action.

Furthermore, we should not feel uneasy about the benefits of food, clothing, and shelter. Instead, we should accept them as they are, perceiving them as gifts from God. What is essential is not to be delighted by material things or saddened by personal loss. Following the same logic, even blasphemy seems to Eckhart to be praising God—blasphemy exerts the power of God, and this insulted God is not God but a creature. Everything is clearly one with God, and, when they work, "God works in them, not they themselves" (Eckhart 2009, p. 521). As both God and Divinity, He is the being that does all true works and also the nothing from where all works come; He demonstrates a synthesis of immanence and transcendence. Humans should act with detachment so that what is done is performed

by both humans and God. Correspondingly, Vedānta philosophy also proclaims that all works are God's work, and we should surrender the results of all works to God.

Considering the two kinds of union found in Catholic mystical theology, the statement here seems too much in favor of the essential union, emphasizing that God is omnipresent. This is because the mystical transforming union achieved by grace is already traditionally emphasized. Just as the philosophy of Vedānta is distinguished herein as Vivekānanda into four types of yoga, Karma Yoga is an "essential union", and Bhakti Yoga is a "mystical transforming union by Grace". Karma Yoga is a unique proposition from Vivekānanda and Bhakti Yoga is already present in the tradition. Although there are several ways of realizing "I am Brahman" in Indian Vedānta, here, we discuss only two ways of doing so. One is the tradition of non-dualism, represented by Śaṅkara, and the other is the neo-Vedānta (also called Hindu modernism), represented by Vivekānanda and Aurobindo.

As mentioned earlier, according to Śaṅkara's philosophy (Mādhavānanda 1921, pp. 45–46) of non-dualism, the biggest issue that humans face is Māyā, which means not clearly seeing that the essence of humans is Brahman. Therefore, to solve this problem, one needs to eliminate ignorance through discrimination, just as the mistaken idea of a snake is eliminated by discriminating between a snake and a rope. The specific practice involves renouncing identification with objective entities, focusing on the eternal Atman through meditation and rejecting the external universe and the world. Śaṅkara explained, "One should avoid the external objects and constantly apply oneself to meditation on the Atman. When the external world is shut out, the mind is cheerful … Hence the shutting out of the external world is the stepping-stone to Liberation" (Mādhavānanda 1921, pp. 147–48). Undoubtedly, Śaṅkara's advances in philosophy are profound. He completed a series of discourses after the Upaniṣads, premised on "I am Brahman", which represent some of his greatest contributions, namely, answering the question: "If I am Brahman, why is the appearance of man so different from that of Brahman?" However, the problem is that his method requires people to reject the external world and focus entirely on their inner selves. This generates a new difficulty: if Brahman is real, and Brahman is inherent in all things, then Brahman is also inherent in external things, so the external world should be real. Therefore, rejecting or closing off the external world and only focusing on the internal true self seems to make us lose a part of Brahman, a path to Brahman through the external world. The result, in India, is that practitioners focus on internal meditation, and more and more people do not participate in real social activities or else have a contemptuous attitude toward real life. This traditional thinking is a huge obstacle from the point of view of national and social development.

The religious reform movement that began in India in the early 19th century aimed to reform the traditional teachings of Vedānta, especially Śaṅkara's idea that the external world is an illusion. The most famous and influential figures of this movement were Swami Vivekānanda and Sri Aurobindo, who are considered representatives of the spirit of neo-Vedānta.

Vivekānanda's view of Māyā differs from Śaṅkara's, or rather, one could say that his attitude towards the external world is not as extreme as Śaṅkara's. Vivekānanda said that "Māyā is not a theory for the explanation of the world; it is simply a statement of facts as they exist, that the very basis of our being is contradiction…that wherever there is good, there must also be evil, and wherever there is evil, there must be some good, wherever there is life, death must follow as its shadow, and everyone who smiles will have to weep, and vice versa" (Vivekānanda 2019b). Like Śaṅkara, Vivekānanda believes that discriminating the real, Brahman, from the unreal can alleviate the suffering caused by contradiction. However, those who meditate are not greater than others who devote themselves to their duties and actions. Traditional Indian scriptures divide a person's life into four stages: "The Hindu begins life as a student; then he marries and becomes a householder; in old age he retires; and lastly he gives up the world and becomes a Sannyasin … No one of these stages is intrinsically superior to another" (Vivekānanda 2019a). Vivekānanda points out

that not only is every stage of life meaningful but also that all actions should be considered worship. The core of his Karma Yoga is self-sacrifice, advocating that people should dedicate the results of their actions to God without seeking the results or rewards of their actions. Here, we see another shift in Indian Vedānta philosophy, from inward meditation to the realizing of "I am Brahman" by various means—inward, secular, meditative, active, reclusive, devotional, and so on.

There is an interesting question: if Māyā refers to the obstacle that we now know we have to overcome in Vedānta, then what is the obstacle in Eckhart's philosophies? What lies between the human and the Divinity? Moreover, what of the things that we once believed should be a breakthrough, from Eckhart's viewpoint? One has to say that it is the personified God, who also represents the fact that Eckhart's philosophy had seen the body, the being, as an obstacle. Only because of the different standpoints of the two philosophies, Māyā is seen as an obstacle, and God is seen as what we break through.

There is a very close connection between Vivekānanda and Aurobindo, the latter being a true intellectual heir of the former. Aurobindo inherited the non-dualistic thought of Vedānta, but he also opposed the negation of the reality of the physical world and the severing of the link between Brahman and the physical world in non-dualism, which is one of the reasons why his philosophy is known as integral transformation. In short, Aurobindo was unsatisfied with the traditional Vedānta discussions of the relationship between Brahman, the self, and the world. He reconstructed the relationships between them, placing them within a continuous whole comprising Matter–Life–Mind–Spirit. In Aurobindo's view, unity with Brahman is not only to realize that one's innermost self is Brahman but also to realize that the gross physical body is also Brahman. His philosophy builds a gradual bridge between the seemingly opposite and incompatible matter and spirit. He believed that the Upaniṣad had already hinted at such a mystery: "Behind their (Matter and Spirit) appearances is the identity in essence of these two extreme terms of existence, in other words, 'Matter also is Brahman'" (Aurobindo 2005, p. 8). Between matter and Brahman, we can roughly discern life and mind. Nevertheless, they all exist within the One, as different intensities of force change continuously and cannot be isolated from each other. This model also appears in contemporary philosophy, such as with Bergson's concept of duration and Deleuze's philosophy of intensity. This model is like a spectrum, where we can see different ranges of color, but the substance that makes up each color of light is the same, and there are no strict boundaries between the ranges. We can only make vague distinctions. At the most subtle transition from red light to orange light, or the point where matter turns into life, i.e., the transition from inorganic to organic, we cannot separate them. In general, Aurobindo's Matter–Life–Mind–Spirit structure has the following characteristics: (a) Brahman pervades the entire structure, but "reality is not a sum or a concourse"; (b) there is a distinction between matter and substance. Substance can be regarded as Brahman, constituting matter, life, mind, and spirit (Aurobindo 2005, p. 38). We can talk about substance that constitutes matter, we can talk about purely dynamic life-energy substances, or we can construct the concept of entities, either philosophically or spiritually. Spirit itself is the pure substance of being, which is no longer the object of matter, life, or spiritual perception; however, it is the radiance of purely spiritual perceptual knowledge, in which the subject becomes its own object, that is to say, in which timelessness and spaceless are aware of themselves as the basis and primordial material of all existence in the self-extension of purely spiritual self-perception (Aurobindo 2005, p. 255). When the subject becomes its own object, it truly realizes that "I am Brahman"; (c) between matter and spirit, there is an infinite gradation (Aurobindo 2005, p. 268). As mentioned earlier, within this spectrum, there is no opposite or distinct entity.

Aurobindo (2005, pp. 8–19) strongly opposed the traditional non-dualistic view that the world is an illusion. He argued that since the world is also Brahman, there is no need to renounce the world to realize "I am Brahman". In his opinion, what is generally seen as being evil or obstructive does not exist as a concrete entity. It is merely the unreasonable demand among different ranges or forces. In the case of mind and life, for example,

when the need for matter exceeds a specific limit, matter becomes an obstructive force, but, at the same time, it is also the force by which matter maintains itself (Aurobindo 2005, pp. 258–59). This thought aligns with Eckhart's concept of compliance and the acceptance of everything that God gives. Thus, in Aurobindo's ashram, we see a pattern that is completely different from traditional Indian ashrams—no idols, no crosses, no monastic robes, no rituals, and no precepts. Practitioners must participate in productive labor and learn cultural knowledge; they must perform physical exercises and appreciate music and paintings. They must integrate their entire spiritual practice into every action in their daily life.

5. Conclusions

Eckhart's philosophy and sermons respond to the universal view and dualistic tradition that man and God are different from each other, responding to issue B: "Generally speaking, why is it that humans are not already one with God?" He tries to tell us that we must seek union with God by self-emptying. However, this union beyond time and space is so idealized and difficult that it has to respond to issue A, "How can we claim that humans (living in this finite world) are already one with God?" Here, humans no longer seek the personified God but rather experience the fundamental nothingness of the Divinity in detachment and, thus, recognize that everything expresses the Divinity. Fundamentally, Eckhart puts more emphasis on the Divinity and detachment. Vedānta begins with the idea that "I am Brahman"; at its starting point, this confronts issue A. In order to rationalize how a finite human can be Brahman, the concept of Māyā emerges. Just as Śaṅkara gives his view of the ego and of this world as unreal, a new difficulty arises: if there is something unreal in oneself, how can one say "I am Brahman"? Then Vedānta has to face issue B. Ultimately, Vedānta philosophy moves toward an emphasis on the concept that "all is Brahman", the idea that all work is Brahman itself acting with humans. This is the symmetrical structure within the development of Eckhart's and Vedānta philosophies, which culminates in their giving an essential role to the impersonal divine and emphasizing the importance of work and this worldly life.

In both Vedānta philosophy and Eckhart's works, God is considered perfect, omnipresent, and creating rather than being a creature. Thus, we have the Divine as nothing and the Brahman that which enfolds everything, which is also the relationship between the Divine and God in Eckhart's philosophy. As God is perfect, it seems to be inappropriate to attribute physical and mental pain and the imperfections of this worldly life to God, which gives rise to the idea of being one with God through the renunciation of the secular world and the body. Furthermore, God should be seen in all activities because God is omnipresent. A dilemma has arisen between issues A and B. This dilemma infuses Vedānta and Eckhart's philosophies with developments and tensions that bring out a kind of apparent contradiction in their different logical stages. These two philosophies each start from one pole of this dilemma and experience the other's issue at the other pole of the seesaw; both ultimately agree on the idea that all is One, the Divinity, indicating that all work is already the path to the One.

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Notes

1 This tendency is evident in the fact that Eckhart consistently emphasizes the concepts of God and Divinity in various texts, aiming to guide individuals on how to seek and love God, as well as on how to lead a virtuous religious life. While Catholic mystical theology recognizes two forms of union—an essential union and a mystical transforming union achieved by grace—what appears to be crucial in Eckhart's philosophy is always the essential union, although the mystical transforming union has been important to earlier thinkers.

2 "… delving deeper and ever seeking, she grasps God in His oneness and in his solitude … does not rest content but quests on to find out what it is that God is in His Godhead and in the ownness of His own nature" (Eckhart 2009, p. 338).

3 According to Paul Deussen (1921, p. 21), while the ideas of the *Upaniṣads* originated among the Brahmins, they were developed and matured in the *kṣatriya* class before being accepted by the Brahmins. The ideas of the *Upaniṣads* did not initially receive strong support and promotion among the Brahmins. K.N. Upadhyaya (1938, p. 78) argued that Paul Deussen may not have considered the non-Brahmin origins of the ideas found in the *Upaniṣads*. However, their content was indeed influenced by the *kṣatriya* class, with many of the thinkers in the *Upaniṣads* belonging to this class. The point that I want to emphasize here is that while the *Upaniṣads* are generally considered to be part of the orthodox Brahmanical philosophy in India, their philosophical positions do conflict with the Vedas, especially in terms of the sacrificial rituals. In particular, the proposition "*I am Brahman*" could have been regarded as heresy by the Brahmin priests of the time.

4 Eckhart gave examples such as: "Just as my eye cannot speak and my tongue cannot recognize colors, so love cannot incline to anything but goodness and God" (Eckhart 2009, p. 99).

5 Vinzent (2011, pp. 57–58) demonstrated the rich origins of the word detachment.

6 Vinzent (2011, pp. 223–26) explained in detail why detachment is superior to humility.

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Article

A Comparative Study of Medieval Religious Spirituality: Bonaventure's Theory of Six Stages of Spirituality and Śaṅkara's Sixfold Practice Theory of Advaita Vedānta

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Abstract: In medieval India, the desire for "the unity of Brahman and Self" was present in the Vedānta tradition of Hinduism. Adi Śaṅkara, the master of Vedānta philosophy, proposed the six-fold sādhana: mind control, sense control, mental tranquility, endurance, potential faith, and concentration. These six-fold practices can help Vedānta followers realize unity with Brahman. In medieval Christianity, mysticism was regarded as an important path for Christians to seek a closer relationship with God. Pursuing "the unity of God and man" became the goal and direction of Christians at that time, which could be achieved through spirituality. Bonaventure, known as the Seraphic Doctor, was a representative figure of medieval Christian mysticism. He proposed six stages of spirituality: Sense, Imagination, Reason, Intelligence, Understanding, and Spark of Conscience, through which one can achieve unity with God. This article attempts to compare Bonaventure's theory of six stages of spirituality with Śaṅkara's idea of six-fold practice and discover the similarities and differences between Eastern and Western religious spirituality in the Middle Ages. Through this comparison, we can further explore the medieval religious believers' desire for ultimate reality and try to find the possibility of dialogue between Christianity and Advaita Vedānta.

Keywords: Śaṅkara; Bonaventure; comparative theology; spiritual formation; sādhana

1. Introduction

We generally believe that Eastern and Western religious traditions are very different, but, coincidentally, there was a similar method of realizing oneness with ultimate reality in medieval Christianity and Hinduism, which was called spiritual formation or sādhana.

Adi Śaṅkara (788–820) was one of the greatest philosophical masters in medieval India. He inherited part of the teachings of traditional Advaita and developed new ideas. He was not only a philosopher but also a great spiritual guru who was beloved by his devotees. Śaṅkara organized the free-moving monks into ten orders of monks, called daśanāmī (ten) orders. He also established four maṭhas or monasteries in the four corners of India (Potter 2014). These monasteries made important contributions to the development of Hinduism. Śaṅkara discussed in detail the "six treasures", which are the six practices of the aspirant, in *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*[1] and *Tattvabodha*.

Bonaventure (1221–1274), known as Dr. Seraphim, was a representative figure of medieval Christian mysticism. Born in Bagnorea, Italy, Bonaventure was a Franciscan bishop, theologian, and philosopher. He was a contemporary of Thomas Aquinas. Thomas Aquinas based his theological system on Aristotelianism, while Bonaventure's ideological background was derived from Augustinianism in the Platonic tradition (Gilson 1965). *The Soul's Journey into God* written by Bonaventure is an important spiritual work. In this book, he proposed six stages of ascent to God through spiritual formation. Next, we will explore their respective spiritual thoughts through the above-mentioned works and make comparisons.

2. Śaṅkara on the Six Treasures

The important idea in Indian philosophy—"the unity of Brahman and Self"—is the core content of Śaṅkara's Advaita thought. According to Śaṅkara, this theory refers to the fact that there is no duality between the true Self and Brahman as the sole ultimate reality. In other words, Ātman and Brahman are one and the same. The sacred phrases "Tat Tvam Asi" (You are that) and "Ayam Ātmā Brahma" (I am Brahman) are strong proofs of this view.

In Śaṅkara's theory of liberation, there are two paths through which devotees can attain liberation. One path is the theistic approach. For those who believe in God, they should work selflessly without being attached to the results. They should give up the fruits of their work and devote all the fruits to God. The other path is the path of knowledge. For believers, "Brahman and I are one" is the highest truth, that is, true knowledge. They must distinguish what is true and recognize that Brahman alone is the ultimate reality. Everything else is false because they are all illusions superimposed on Brahman due to ignorance. The path of knowledge is a process of discernment–enlightenment–liberation. The result of these two paths is the same: the elimination of ignorance, the realization of the unity of self and Brahman, freedom from suffering, and the attainment of endless bliss. No matter which path one chooses, one should first become a qualified seeker who must undergo the training of spiritual practice. What kind of person is a qualified seeker? In the book *Ātmabodha* (*Self-Knowledge*), Śaṅkara began with the clear statement, "I am composing the Ātmabodha, or Self-Knowledge, to serve the needs of those who have been purified through the practice of austerities, and who are peaceful in heart, free from cravings, and desirous of Liberation." (Nikhilananda 1946, p. 117). Śaṅkara explained that a qualified seeker should possess four qualifications: viveka, vairāgya, śamādi-ṣaṭka-sampatti, and mumukṣutva[2].

Śamādi-ṣaṭka-sampatti means six treasures, which are the six practices I am mainly discussing. Sādhana is a significant topic in Hinduism. The *Bhagavad Gītā* (17.14–16) mentions three kinds of penance: the austerity of body, the austerity of speech, and the austerity of mind. The Six Treasures are the most practical part of the seeker's fourfold spiritual practice, which shares certain similarities with Christian spirituality. The six treasures are Śama (mind control), Dama (sense control), Uparati (mental tranquility), Titīkṣā (endurance or patience), Śraddhā(potential faith), and Samādhāna (concentration). According to Śaṅkara's philosophy, these six spiritual exercises are the fundamental practices of Advaita. Before pursuing true knowledge, the seeker must make his/her mind calm, restrained, and full of endurance, which requires the help of the six practices. If aspirants can practice effectively, they can remove their bondage and maintain peace of mind. Seekers should not only practice in daily life, but also regard these qualities as treasures once acquired.

2.1. Śama (Mind Control)

शमः कः? मनो-निग्रहः । (*Tattvabodha* 1.3.1)[3]

Śamaḥ kaḥ? Mano-nigrahaḥ.

Śaṅkara defined śama in *Tattvabodha*: "What is śama? It is the restraint of the mind". Mind control is the restraint of the waves of the mind. Mind control interacts with sense control. Śama is also mentioned in *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* (22), "The resting of the mind steadfastly on its Goal (viz. Brahman) after having detached itself from manifold sense-objects by continually observing their defects, is called Shama or calmness." (Madhavananda 1921, p. 9). Śama can be understood as calmness, which is the stability of the mind whose goal is Brahman. The way to control the mind is to constantly observe and discern the objects of sense. After understanding the defects of sense objects, we should strive to restrain our minds from tending to sense objects. The aim is to detach the mind from the objects of sense and return to its own essential nature. Finally, the mind calmed down. According to Śaṅkara, the mind is an extremely active instrument. It makes one attached to all sense objects. Therefore, it is the root of all troubles. People are in bondage by their restless minds.

Then, if one wants to be detached from sense objects and free from bondage, he/she must control the mind. Swami Vivekananda believed that, when the mind is controlled, one can achieve anything. As Ramakrishna stated (Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York n.d.), only the mind has the possibility of being bound and the ability to be liberated. Once the mind is free from attachment, God will be realized.

2.2. Dama (Sense Control)

दमः कः? चक्षुरादि-बाह्येन्द्रिय-निग्रहः ।। (*Tattvabodha* 1.3.2)

Damaḥ kaḥ? Cakṣurādi-bāhyendriya-nigrahaḥ.

"What is sense control? It is the control of the eyes and other external organs". According to Śaṅkara's thought, the term bāhyendriya (external senses) encompasses five sense organs and five action organs. The five sense organs are the eyes, ears, nose, skin, and tongue. The five action organs are hands, feet, mouth, excretory organs, and reproductive organs. The senses are the gateways to the phenomenal world which link us to the external world. They are governed by the mind, which attaches itself to the sense organs and goes out. It then returns and takes the form of an object. The final identification is made by the internal senses. This is the process of perception. The sense organs cannot perceive anything by themselves; only when the mind is attached to them can they respond. Swami Vivekananda gave the example of a bell to illustrate this point. Many times, when you are deeply immersed in an idea, you do not hear the bell ringing. This is because the mind is not connected to the organs (Vivekananda 1970). Sense organs help us understand external objects. Subsequently, egoism has the desire to get something. At this moment, the action organs begin to function. We are bound. The senses are tools in the hands of the mind. They lead us to their respective objects and deceive us that these objects are eternal. The connection of the senses and the mind creates countless troubles. The senses and minds that do whatever they want will disturb our minds and take us farther and farther away from the door of liberation. Therefore, the aspirant must strive to conquer the senses and control the mind. As the *Bhagavad Gītā* (3.6–3.7) conveys, he who does selfless things by controlling his mind and organs is a great person. Conversely, someone who seems to be sitting quietly and controlling the organs of action, but is carrying out countless actions in his heart, is a hypocrite. So how does one control your senses? The *Bhagavad Gītā* (2.58) uses the analogy of a tortoise, suggesting that one should withdraw the senses from their objects, just as a tortoise retracts its limbs into its shell. For humans, closing their eyes can be seen as a form of sense control. Likewise, if one can "turn off" external organs such as ears under the guidance of the mind, they succeed in controlling their senses. In other words, we need to actively withdraw our minds from our feelings. It should be noted that control does not mean suppression. Controlling the senses is accomplished through the guidance of the mind. Instead of allowing our senses to run toward external objects as wild horses would, we must hold the reins of our minds and steer them toward the inner light.

2.3. Uparati (Mental Tranquility)

उपरतिः कः? स्वधर्मानुष्ठानमेव । (*Tattvabodha* 1.3.3)

Uparatiḥ kaḥ? Svadharma-anuṣṭhānam-eva.

"What is peace of mind? One who follows natural duty is uparati". Uparati has three meanings. The first meaning is "peace of mind". Uparati and śama both mean "peace of mind", but there are some nuances in the meanings of the two words. Śama pertains to calming a disturbed mind, while uparati refers to maintaining an already calm mind unchanged. Śama is the way to pacify disturbances, while uparati prevents disturbances or maintains inner peace. We can think of one as treatment and the other as prevention. The second meaning is related to the concept of sannyāsa. Uparati can be understood as accepting the vows of sannyāsa or living a monastic life. In *Tattvabodha*, Śaṅkara gave uparati a third meaning, which is the purification of the mind through the selfless performance of daily duties. Śaṅkara categorized karma into five types: Kāmya Karma (desire-born ac-

tions), Niśiddha Karma (sinful actions), Nitya Karma (daily obligatory), Naimittika Karma (occasional duties), and Prāyaścitta Karma (purificatory actions) (Sunirmalananda 2005). Uparati means fulfilling Nitya Karma and Naimittika Karma wholeheartedly. Daily duties include acts such as sacrifice, worship, meditation, prayer, and more, while occasional duties mainly involve celebrating some sacred festivals. Both actions purify the mind and maintain lasting peace of mind. *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* (23) puts uparati and dama together and mainly talks about the first meaning of uparati. The best uparati involved keeping the mind in a state of peace in which the mind is no longer affected by external things.

2.4. Titīkṣā (Endurance or Patience)

तितीक्षा का? शीतोष्णसुखदुःखादि द्वन्द्व सहिष्णुत्वम् । (*Tattvabodha* 1.3.4)

Titīkṣā kā? Śītoṣṇa-sukha-duḥkhādi dvandva-sahiṣṇutvam.

"What is titīkṣā? titīkṣā means to endure the dualities of cold and heat, pleasure and pain with equanimity". In daily life, it is difficult for ordinary people to endure the pain. When we are in pain, we are unable to do anything meaningful. Spiritual progress is even less possible. However, the saint showed no reaction in the face of pain. Haridāsa was beaten by many people in the market, but his endurance was extraordinary. He just smiled and suffered the beatings, chanting the name of God. *The imitation of Christ*[4] said, "Without striving thou canst not win the crown of patience; if thou wilt not suffer thou refusest to be crowned. But if thou desirest to be crowned, strive manfully, endure patiently." (A Kempis [1471–1472] 1877, p. 150). Sages are indifferent when confronted with pain, as they know that the dualities of cold and heat, pain and pleasure are all transient. These occasional irritations are meaningless. The endurance threshold of saints is very high, just like Swami Vivekananda who could endure hunger, heat, and cold while wandering. That is, everyone has their own unique pain threshold. The higher the spiritual capacity, the better the capacity of endurance. Therefore, titīkṣā is the increase in the level of our threshold of endurance. According to *Tattvabodha*, Śaṅkara believes that one aspect of titīkṣā is to improve the body's endurance, such as enduring cold and heat, which is called endurance. On the other hand, it is to improve the endurance of the mind, such as enduring pain and happiness calmly, which is called patience. These two levels are collectively called titīkṣā. In modern terms, people need to bolster both physical immunity and mental endurance. *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* (24) has more additions to titīkṣā. "The bearing of all afflictions without caring to redress them, being free (at the same time) from anxiety or lament on their score, is called Titīkṣā or forbearance." (Madhavananda 1921). In *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, Śaṅkara emphasized that genuine endurance is an internal quality, rather than an external display of passive austerity or asceticism. After distinguishing between truth and unreality, seekers understand the truth of suffering and cease to cling to the elimination of suffering. Instead, they begin to calmly tolerate the anxiety and sadness caused by pain.

2.5. Śraddhā (Potential Faith)

श्रद्धा कीदृशी? गुरु-वेदान्त-वाक्येषु विश्वासः श्रद्धा । (*Tattvabodha* 1.3.5)

Śraddhā kīdṛśī? Guru-vedānta-vākyeṣu viśvāsaḥ śraddhā.

"What is the nature of Śraddhā? śraddhā is belief in the Guru and the words of Vedānta". In the Vedānta system, the Guru is the spiritual master. According to *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* (33), the Guru possesses three qualities: (i) on the intellectual level, the Guru is a knower of Brahman and must be proficient in the Vedic scriptures, (ii) on the moral level, the Guru is free from sin, (iii) on the spiritual level, the Guru is not disturbed by desires and exhibits complete control over the mind. In summary, a Guru is a knower of Brahman who is proficient in the scriptures, understands the truth, and has attained liberation. In *Tattvabodha*, Śaṅkara said that a seeker should have absolute faith in the words of the Guru and the teachings found in the scriptures. This is śraddhā. We can perceive the process of spiritual practice as a form of healing to eliminate ignorance and break free fromsaṃsāra, much like the way we treat physical ailments. In the process of treating

physical illnesses, we must first believe in the medical system. Secondly, we must have full trust in the doctor and cooperate actively. Likewise, in the process of spiritual practice, the Vedānta scriptures serve as our system of medicine and the Guru is our doctor. Is this faith in Vedānta and Guru unfounded? No, the prerequisite for our confidence is discernment. According to *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* (23), through discernment, the seeker concludes that the scriptures and the teachings of the Guru are true, and, then, develops a firm and positive belief based on this understanding. This belief helps us recognize the ultimate reality.

2.6. Samādhāna (Concentration)

समाधानं किम्? चित्तैकाग्रता । (*Tattvabodha* 1.3.6)

Samādhānaṁ kim? Cittaikāgratā.

"What is concentration? Concentration is to focus the mind on one point——Brahman or Ātman". In *Tattvabodha*, samādhāna means concentration. In *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* (26), concentration refers to the continuous concentration of the mind on pure Brahman, rather than the mind becoming obsessed with an object out of curiosity. The oldest and most effective way to practice concentration is dhyāna, which means meditation or contemplation. In the Indian culture, meditation is the key to practice, especially in yoga. The Aṣṭāṅga yoga system proposed by Patañjali in the *Yoga Sūtra* includes meditation. In *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* (277), Śaṅkara instructed his disciples to use yoga methods to practice concentration. He suggested that the seeker should keep his mind focused on Ātman as a yogi would. Then, comes the end of desire. Finally, all the superpositions on Brahman are eliminated. Meditation, in its broadest sense, assumes two main forms: object meditation and subject meditation. Object meditation means the mind meditating on objects external or internal to the body. Subjective meditation means that the mind contemplates the Self itself, which can also be said to be contemplating Ātman or Brahman. In *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* (380–381), Śaṅkara directly declares that the object of meditation for the seeker is Ātman. He also elaborated on the necessity of meditating on Brahman in verses 254–266. The sacred phrase "You are That" means Brahman and I are the same. Ātman is the supreme, indivisible Infinite One. There is nothing but Self. Hence, by allowing the mind to relinquish all illusory attachments and consistently meditating on Ātman, one can realize that Ātman is their true self. Through repeated efforts to practice meditation, seekers can achieve mental tranquility. The purer their minds, the stronger their desire to know the truth. At this stage, seekers are no longer governed by worldly desires, but earnestly long for the truth. They direct their mind focus on the Self, absolute knowledge, and ultimately attain the realization of the infinite self.

3. Bonaventure on the Six Stages of Christian Spirituality

As a Franciscan master, on the one hand, Bonaventure adhered to the ideals of poverty and simplicity, on the other hand, he emphasized intellectual training, because he was educated at a famous European university. He firmly believed that theology and spirituality could be integrated on the path to oneness with God[5]. He advocated finding grace in nature and believed that nature and grace were not separate but mixed. According to him, philosophy follows the natural path of reason to acquire knowledge, and its purpose is to guide believers towards God. In other words, philosophy is a preparatory stage for entering into God, a vehicle for the soul's journey toward God. In addition to using reason to prove the existence of God, he also emphasized the importance of understanding God through people's inner emotions and experiences, which amounts to the exercise of the soul, because he believes that God is not just an abstract principle that can be understood by people, but always lives in people's hearts. People can establish a connection with God in their lives, and their souls can unite with God. "All proofs of God are nothing more than reflections intended to form in us a correct idea of God, and to make us realize more clearly how wrong our previous ideas of God are. These are not so much a demonstration as an exercise of the soul, through which it embarks on its journey to God." (Xiong 2005). In one of Bonaventure's greatest works, *The Soul's Journey into God (Itinerarium Mentis in Deum)*[6],

he discussed the disciplines that the soul must undergo before it can enter into God. In 1259, under a divine impulse, Bonaventure wanted to seek a quiet place, longing to find peace of mind there. He went to Mount La Verna in Tuscany, the spot where St. Francis had a vision and received the stigmata (Macquarrie 2005). While pondering the vision of St. Francis of Assisi in this place, Bonaventure was inspired to write this book.

Seraphim is a type of angel with three pairs of wings. Bonaventure was called "Dr. Seraphim" because he drew a parallel between these six wings and the six spiritual faculties. Using these six spiritual faculties as paths, believers can go to the place where God lives as seraphim does. These three pairs of wings represent the six spiritual stages before believers enter into God. The six stages of abilities of the soul are sensus (sense), imagination (imagination), ratio (reason), intelligentia (intelligence), intellectus (understanding), and apex mentis seu synderesis scintilla (the apex of the mind or spark of conscience). All believers who desire to ascend to God must cultivate these six natural abilities to be free from the sin that distorts their nature. In *The Soul's Journey into God,* Bonaventure asserted that to arrive at the place of God, we should progress through the vestiges of God, which are material, temporal, and external. We also must enter our soul, which is the eternal image of God that is spiritual and internal in our mind. Finally, we must ascend to the eternal and supreme realm beyond ourselves to contemplate the First Principle (Bonaventure [1259] 1978).

3.1. Contemplate God by His Vestiges

The initial two stages involve the contemplation of the relics of God. In this part, the objects of the mind are material and external.

De gradibus ascensionis in deum et de speculatione ipsius per vestigia eius in universe[7] (Bonaventure 1259).

"The steps to ascend to God and how to contemplate Him through His vestiges in the universe". The first stage is the contemplation of God through His vestiges in the world. Awareness of creation in the sensible world is the first step on our path to God. God is the Creator; therefore, all creation reflects God Himself to varying degrees, and all things are vestiges of God. The omnipotence, wisdom, and kindness of the Creator are embodied in creation (Bonaventure [1259] 1978). The senses include physical senses and internal senses. The physical senses can convey the omnipotence, wisdom, and goodness of the Creator to the inner senses through three methods: contemplation, faith, and rational inquiry, thereby stimulating the love, worship, and gratitude of the soul towards God. Contemplation means considering things as they are. We observe the external characteristics of creation, including its form, type, function, etc., which all come from the Almighty Creator. Faith leads us to think about the origin, development, and end of the world. By faith, we believe in the continuity of the world's development. We think about the first principle, God's providence, and justice. Rational inquiry can be thought of as discernment. We distinguish whether things exist or are alive, whether they are material or spiritual, and whether they are temporary or immortal. With the awareness of these visible things by the senses, we comprehend the existence of God. God is alive, eternal, immortal, and purely spiritual. Therefore, controlling the senses to understand the world is an important step before being closer to God. We must open our eyes, ears, mouths, and other senses to see and hear vestiges of God in the created world and praise God. Otherwise, you will be an ignorant who does not know God as the First Principle and the ultimate reality.

3.2. Contemplate God in His Vestiges

De speculatione dei in vestigiis suis in hoc sensibili mundo (Bonaventure 1259).

"Contemplate God in His vestiges in this sensitive world". After learning to employ the physical senses to detect vestiges of God, the next practice is to contemplate God in these vestiges of God. That is, we should contemplate God in external things, as their images enter our souls through the senses. Everyone's soul can be likened to a small world (Bonaventure [1259] 1978). The soul is united to the body in a separable way. Objects

in the external world or the macrocosm can infiltrate the small world through the five senses. For example, we perceive solid objects through touch and the colorful things through sight. These things do not enter our souls as substances, but are perceived as likenesses. In modern terminology, likeness means concept. These likenesses pass from the external organs into the internal organs through the medium and are finally realized by the apprehensive faculty of the soul. The sense of external objects intuitively elicits feelings of pleasure or pain. Individuals then make judgments, such as evaluating the source of their happiness. Through the process of judgment, images of the external world are brought into the rational faculty of the soul. Since all things are created by God, the process of individuals capturing external things through their senses based on knowledge, feeling happy, and judging represents a process of describing God. It is God himself who generates an identical image. This all-pervading image unites the human senses and brings a sense of fulfillment and happiness, thus leading individuals back toward God.

During these initial two stages, we must exercise our senses in recognizing visible creation, as creation serves as a vestige of God. We can understand the invisible God behind them through these external, visible, and sensible aspects of creation. Once we learn to use our senses to contemplate God externally, we next turn our attention inwards and contemplate God within ourselves.

3.3. Contemplate God by His Image

In the third and fourth stages, we turn our attention to our soul. We should exercise the power of reason and intellect within the soul to introspect and contemplate God through His image.

De speculatione dei per suam imaginem naturalibus potentiis insignitam (Bonaventure 1259).

"Contemplate God through His image marked by natural powers". In the third stage, we turn inward to contemplate God through the image of God in our own souls. Just creatures can serve as guides to help us know God, it is reasonable that humans, as creatures, can also understand God by knowing themselves. This form of knowledge is deeper than realizing God through knowing external phenomena. For in our souls, the light of truth shines like a candle on the face of our souls. The image of the Trinity also shines (Bonaventure [1259] 1978). Differing from the previous two stages which involved practicing senses and imagination to understand external objects, this stage demands that we must understand ourselves by using the power of reason. The first faculty of the soul is memory, a repository of the timeless. "For the memory retains the past by remembrance, the present by reception, and the future by foresight." (Bonaventure [1259] 1978, p. 80). This faculty of memory is akin to God, indivisibly present in the past, present, and future. Memory can obtain information from the external senses, and it can also obtain the above knowledge in a simple form. Memory can present unchanging truths. Therefore, we recognize that the human soul is the image of God, and the human soul can comprehend God. The second faculty of the soul is intellectual understanding. Our intelligence can comprehend the highest truth, which is also the prerequisite for our ability to comprehend other things. The third faculty of the soul is the power of choice or will. "The function of the power of choice is found in deliberation, judgment, and desire." (Bonaventure [1259] 1978, p. 83). The purpose of these three steps is to lead to the highest good. Bonaventure summarized the three abilities of the soul: the memory leads to eternity, the understanding of truth, and the power of choice to the highest good (Bonaventure [1259] 1978). These three faculties reflect the Trinity within the human soul. Understanding emanates from memory, and choice is based on understanding. When individuals exercise the faculties of the soul, it is akin to looking into a mirror and seeing the Holy Trinity through themselves in the mirror. This also acknowledges the existence of the eternal and supremely good God.

3.4. Contemplate God in His Image

De speculatione dei in sua imagine donis gratuitis reformata (Bonaventure 1259).

"Contemplate God in His own image reformed with free gifts." In the previous stage, we discovered that the image of God is immanent in our souls. At this stage, we should enter into the image of God residing in our souls and contemplate God. We can contemplate the image of God with the help of our natural faculties, but the truth is that few people can genuinely contemplate God in their souls. Bonaventure claimed that the mind is so absorbed in external matters that it cannot return to its true self. The mind is distracted by care, clouded by sense images, and seduced by desire (Bonaventure [1259] 1978, p. 87). So, how can we purify our souls? By faith, hope, and love for God and Christ. Bonaventure said that the image of our soul, therefore, should be clothed with the three theological virtues by which the soul is purified, illuminated, and perfected (Bonaventure [1259] 1978, p. 89). Similar to the early church fathers, Bonaventure emphasized the importance of the spiritual experience of God through the spiritual senses. Through faith, desire, and love for Christ, our spiritual senses are restored. The purification of our soul is completed. We delve deep into our souls and witness God's transformation within them. Here, we can feel the loving kindness of God.

In the third stage, we exercise the soul's ability to introspect and recognize that the image of God resides in the soul. We should use rational and intellectual methods to contemplate God through His image in the soul. In the fourth stage, we rely on the three virtues given by God to govern our spiritual senses, purify our souls, and ascend toward God.

3.5. Contemplate the Divine Unity through Its Primary Name Which Is Being

As we enter the fifth and sixth stages, the mind turns to God Himself.

De speculatione divinae unitatis per eius nomen primarium, quod est esse (Bonaventure 1259).

"Contemplate the divine unity through Its primary name which is Being.". In the previous two sections, we contemplated God first externally and then within our minds. Now, we contemplate God directly from God Himself. At this stage, Bonaventure proposes that we focus on the idea that God is Being itself. "Hence Moses was told: I am who am." (Bonaventure [1259] 1978, p. 95). God is the absolute Being itself. It is beginningless and eternal, it does not have any non-existence, it is pure, it has no possibility, for any possibility may be non-existence, it is the most real. As Being itself, it has no defects, it has no diversity, it is perfect, it is the Supreme. These attributes of God as Being itself can be arrived at through rational inquiry. God as Being itself permeates space–time, and then all other existences derive from this Being. God's grace overflows from His own essence, but, sometimes, there is blindness in people's senses and reason. Our eyes may be drawn to the allure of the created world, but we ignore the Being itself that we as creatures will first encounter. As a result, we often encounter God last, but, fortunately, God is both the beginning and the end. We all could rest our souls in God.

3.6. Contemplate the Most Blessed Trinity in Its Name Which Is Good

De speculatione beatissimae trinitatis in eius nomine, quod est bonum (Bonaventure 1259).

"Contemplate the most blessed trinity in Its name which is good". In the sixth stage, God is contemplated as Goodness. Bonaventure said that goodness is self-diffusive. Therefore, God, as the highest good, must naturally extend His goodness. The greatest diffusion is the simultaneous production of a beloved and a co-beloved, the one generated and the other inspired in the highest good. These divine relationships correspond to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. "Here is supreme communicability with individuality of persons, supreme consubstantiality with plurality of hypostases, supreme configurability with distinct personality, supreme coequality with degree supreme coeternity with emanation, supreme mutual intimacy with mission." (Bonaventure [1259] 1978, p. 105). As we contemplate the truth of the Trinity, all we have to do is marvel and praise. Bonaventure advocated that we should contemplate the mystery of the Trinity through Jesus Christ, the

mediator between God and humanity. Union with Christ becomes the inevitable pathway into the divine Trinity. In *The Soul's Journey into God*, Bonaventure said: "For we should wonder not only at the essential and personal properties of God in themselves but also in comparison with the super wonderful union of God and man in the unity of the Person of Christ." (Bonaventure [1259] 1978, p. 106).

In the last two stages of contemplation, we exercise the soul's power of understanding and pursue the illumination of the soul. It is through Christ that our souls realize the union of our humanity with God. At this point, the insight of the mind rests. Having reached the end of the sixth stage, the soul's journey is complete. In the seventh stage, we let our intellect rest and redirect all our emotions and passions toward God. The prerequisite for full union with God is knowing God. Philosophical methods help us in this preparation, but knowledge ultimately gives way to passion. Bonaventure said at the end of the book:

> "But if you wish to know how these things come about, ask grace not instruction, desire not understanding, the groaning of prayer not diligent reading, the Spouse not the teacher, God not man, darkness not clarity, not light but the fire that inflames and carries us into God by ecstatic unctions and burning affections." (Bonaventure [1259] 1978, p. 115)

4. Compare the Similarities and Differences between the Two Paths

After discussing Śaṅkara's six sādhanas and Bonaventure's six stages of spirituality, respectively, we find that there are certain similarities in their thoughts on the characteristics of the ultimate reality and the methods of spiritual practice.

Firstly, both Śaṅkara and Bonaventure recognized that there is a supreme ultimate reality. According to Śaṅkara, Brahman is not an object, but an eternal subject. Brahman is the Absolute Infinite which pervades everything and represents absolute knowledge. When Śaṅkara discussed Samādhāna, he directly mentioned that the object of concentration and meditation is Brahman or Ātman. Because in Śaṅkara's theory, everything, except for the Supreme Being Brahman, is false. Bonaventure also argued that God is the first principle and God is Existence itself. In the fifth stage of spiritual practice, Bonaventure suggested that spiritual disciplines should be directed toward God himself. He proposed that "Being" is the first name of God. People's first concept is existence, and the concept of non-existence arises from the absence of existence. Therefore, understanding existence is the prerequisite for grasping non-existence. Understanding actual existence is the prerequisite for understanding potential existence. The Existence itself is intelligible and purely real. It is not an individual existence or a specific category of existence, rather, it is a divine existence. Bonaventure said that God is the original, eternal, simplest, most realistic, perfect, and unique existence (Bonaventure [1259] 1978, p. 97).

Secondly, they all proposed methods to attain oneness with ultimate reality through spiritual practice. In both practices, they all believe that the key to spiritual practice is the six abilities of believers. Śaṅkara declared that the six treasures are the spiritual methods for seekers to pursue Brahman. Seekers should also possess these six qualities and abilities. We start with śama and dama. The aspirant should practice controlling the mind and letting the mind direct the senses to withdraw from external objects. Next is uparati. We maintain peace of mind by observing our natural duties. Additionally, we need to cultivate the endurance of the mind, which is titīkṣā. Faith brings the soul to truth, which is called śraddhā. Eventually, our minds begin to think seriously about Ātman. This stage is called samādhāna. Our mind is focused on the Self, Absolute Knowledge through meditation. Ultimately, this practice leads us to realize the infinite self and attain the state of unity of Brahma and the self. The spiritual practice proposed by Bonaventure also comprises six stages. In the first two stages, we should practice using our senses and imagination to find vestiges of God in all things and to contemplate God in His vestiges. Because all creation is created by God and reflects God Himself in some way. Awareness of creation in the sensible world is the first step on our path to God. In this section, Bonaventure emphasizes the role of the senses and imagination. The senses connect us to the external creation. Imagination

helps us understand what God is like. In the third and fourth stages, the soul turns from the external to the inward. The faculties of the soul manifest as reason and intelligence. We should contemplate God through His image within our souls. Then, we enter the image of God himself, contemplating God through the faith, hope, and love of His grace. In the last two stages, the soul's faculties appear as understanding. Finally, there is the spark of the soul. We understand God as Being Itself and God as the Supreme Good, thereby directly contemplating God Himself. After traversing these six stages, our souls find rest in God. Eventually, we release our passion and enter a state of ecstasy.

Thirdly, both Śaṅkara and Bonaventure emphasize the importance of mental ability or wisdom in their practice methods. In India, sādhana is an ancient tradition. The *Bhagavad Gītā* uses the phrase abhyāsa(practice) yoga to underscore that practice and renunciation are the paths to liberation. The *Yoga Sutras* illustrated that liberation can be attained through the practice of aṣṭāṅga yoga. In Śaṅkara's system, there is little emphasis on physical practice because Śaṅkara's path to liberation is Jñāna Yoga[8]. Śaṅkara emphasized discernment, control of the mind and senses, and concentration. These abilities are all under the category of human rationality. Similarly, Bonaventure also paid more attention to mental ability and intellectual practice. The Ordo Fratrum Minorum adhered to the principles of asceticism, although Bonaventure inherited St. Francis's thought of poverty. To a certain extent, he emphasized spiritual exercise by wisdom more than pure physical asceticism. Bonaventure advocated learning would be necessary to attain holiness (Lee 2020). He believed that the contemplative life, the ascetic life, and the soul-healing life could all be found in Christianity (Moorman 1968). In the book *The Soul's Journey into God*, Bonaventure mainly discussed the exercise of the mind rather than the physical practices. Both Śaṅkara and Bonaventure repeatedly emphasized the role of the mind and senses. Bonaventure believed that, upon creation, human nature was peaceful and pure, but, due to sin, humanity became ignorant and greedy. Fortunately, they can be graced by God. They must be cleansed by justice, exercised by knowledge, and perfected by wisdom. Bonaventure's views coincide with Śaṅkara's Māyā theory. Māyā envelopes Brahman and Ātman. People's minds attach to false realities, resulting in suffering and bondage. Nonetheless, the mind can return to its true nature through self-effort.

Because of their disparate religious traditions, there are also obvious differences in their spiritual theories.

First, does ultimate reality create everything? In Śaṅkara's theory, Brahman, as the ultimate reality, creates nothing. Bonaventure believed that God created everything. Śaṅkara maintained that everything else except for Brahman is an illusion superimposed on Brahman due to ignorance. Brahman is supreme, indivisible Infinite. Everything else we see in the so-called creation is just superposition. The world is just a superposition on Brahman. All external things are false, so we must control our minds and focus on Brahman. In Bonaventure's thought, God is the ultimate reality and the Creator. Everything is created by God, so all creation has vestiges of God. The world and living beings created by God are real. The first two stages of spirituality proposed by Bonaventure are based on the idea that God created all things. The root of this difference is the disparate understanding of ultimate reality in the two religious traditions.

The second difference is the relationship between ultimate reality and people. This question is also relevant to understanding the effective outcomes of spiritual practice. Śaṅkara maintained that there is no duality between Brahman and Self. In contrast, Bonaventure believed in a duality between God and humanity. Śaṅkara's foundational ideology is the unity of Brahman and the self. Consequently, the practice he proposed involves the process of discovering one's true self. The highest truth or the true knowledge is encapsulated in the phrase "Brahman and I are one". The purpose of jñāna yoga is to realize this supreme truth. With respect to the process of liberation practice, the path of knowledge is a process of discernment–enlightenment–liberation. With a profound yearning for liberation, the seeker initially distinguishes what is real and what is unreal. The seeker then embarks on a series of spiritual practices that include the control of the

mind and senses. Finally, he/she is liberated. From Śaṅkara's perspective, ultimate reality and people's true selves are the same. Therefore, the purpose and most effective result of spiritual practice lies in understanding and realizing the unity of Brahman and the self. In Bonaventure's teachings, God is the ultimate reality that transcends all things. Bonaventure argued that God is Being itself and the supreme Good. His image resides within the human soul, but, fundamentally, God transcends everything, including humanity. God's grace is the prerequisite for all self-effort. Regarding the purpose of this spiritual practice, Bonaventure believed that individuals should let their souls rest in God. The highest state that people can reach through the six stages of spiritual practice is to ascend into God under the grace of God. This state is referred to as the unity of God and human. Bonaventure also emphasized that entering this realm necessitates not only rational exertion, but also the fervent desire of the soul. Ask for grace instead of instruction, for desire instead of understanding, for groans of prayer instead of diligent reading, for a spouse instead of a teacher, for God instead of men, for darkness instead of clarity, not for light but for utter burning fire (Bonaventure [1259] 1978, p. 115). This view is completely different from Śaṅkara's view of self-effort. Śaṅkara asserted that enlightenment can only be achieved through self-effort. There are no intermediaries on the path to enlightenment. As he aptly noted in *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* (54), one can know what the moon is only by looking at it through one's own eyes.

The third disparity is the path of practice. Śaṅkara believed that the sixfold practice is an external–internal process. Bonaventure's six stages represent a bottom-up ascent and a process of introspection from the external to the internal. Śaṅkara's six practices constitute an outside–in process that guides the mind from the external world back to its origin. The core of this process is the management of the mind. Since the ultimate reality—Brahman and Ātman—are one in Śaṅkara's theory, there is no process of ascent and climbing of the mind. On the other hand, Bonaventure said, "Just as there are six stages in the ascent into God, there are six stages in the powers of the soul, through which we ascend from the lowest to the highest, from the exterior to the interior, from the temporal to the eternal." (Bonaventure [1259] 1978, p. 62). Bonaventure divided existence into three levels: creation, soul, and God, all of which correspond to the three objects of contemplation of the soul. The three pairs of wings on the seraphim symbolize ascent, which means that the soul progressively ascends through the wisdom imparted by Christ until it attains a peaceful state. The reason for this contrast is that Śaṅkara believed that Brahman and I are one, while Bonaventure adhered to the concept of duality between God and humans.

5. Conclusions

As it can be seen from what has been discussed above, the most important similar aspect of spirituality is achieving oneness with ultimate reality through the discipline of wisdom. They respectively proposed a six-step spiritual practice method based on wisdom abilities. Śaṅkara's theory of liberation is called Jñāna Yoga. Bonaventure's Six Stages of Spirituality repeatedly emphasize that this is an exercise of the mind that relies on wisdom. However, due to the barriers of religious tradition, the differences between the two theories are also obvious. The first question is whether ultimate reality creates anything. According to Śaṅkara's advaita thought, Brahman does not create anything. Everything we see including the world is an illusion superimposed on Brahman due to ignorance. Bonaventure's ideological foundation is that God is supreme and created all things. Because of this difference, their theories on the relationship between God and man also differ. Śaṅkara followed the Vedic concepts of "You are that" and "I am Brahman". In other words, there is no duality between ultimate reality and the true self. Then, the spiritual practice means that the seeker realizes this truth completely through his own efforts. In Bonaventure's thought, God is the undoubted first cause and created human beings. The dualistic gulf between God and man is unbridgeable. Therefore, the so-called "unity of God and man" is predicated on God's grace rather than self-effort. By comparing Bonaventure's Theory of Six Stages of Spirituality and Śaṅkara's Sixfold Practice Theory of

Vedānta, we find that their theories are very complete and convincing in their respective traditions. They explained their theories of spiritual practice with unique arguments and provided effective practice methods for their respective believers. Their teachings have become integral to Vedānta philosophy and Christian theology. This comparison is a tool for understanding others which can be used to know the beliefs of others and explain the meaning of one's own beliefs. That is, believers can deepen their understanding of their faith by learning about other traditions. Although the encounter between Christianity and Hinduism has made some progress since the nineteenth century, the dialogue between the two traditions is still in its infancy. Richard De Smet and Swami Abhishiktananda have made several contributions to the dialogue between Advaita and Christianity. They seek to grasp the meaning and importance of the Hindu teaching of non-duality to Christian theology and spirituality (Malkovsky 1999). Raimon Panikkar is "an apostle of inner-faith dialogue". Recently, Daniel Soars (2023) has compared the thought of Thomas Aquinas with Advaita and has proposed that the relation between God and the world in Christianity should be understood as non-dual. Comparative methods are applied to various branches of the humanities. As Clooney says, comparative theology is a practical response to religious diversity (Clooney 2010). Faced with the diverse and interconnected world, it is essential to recognize the value of dialogue between different traditions. In daily life, encounters between believers of different religions are inevitable. Conflicts due to differences in religious beliefs or exclusivism also occur from time to time. As a neutral research method, comparative study can draw people's attention to the differences between different traditions. From a comparative perspective, it is easier for us to acknowledge the Other and see that different religious traditions have their unique charms. Respecting, appreciating, and learning from others does not hinder one's own beliefs. For example, Christianity can use the idea of Advaita to deepen its understanding of God, and Vedānta can also find inspiration in Christianity to help its believers grasp the truth. It should be noted that the purpose of mutual understanding and learning is to make human culture richer rather than homogeneous. In the process of comparative study, we should not only maintain the uniqueness of our respective traditions, but also respect the diversity of spirituality so that different religions and cultures can flourish harmoniously.

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Notes

1 The authorship the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* has been questioned. This work is traditionally attributed to Śaṅkara. However, most scholars now reject this attribution. According to Grimes, "modern scholars tend to reject its authenticity as a work by Śaṅkara," while "traditionalists tend to accept it." (Grimes 2004, p. 23). In any case, *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* is an indispensable work of Advaita. So, I consider and discuss it as the work of Śaṅkara now.

2 The fourfold qualification of a seeker of Truth. Viveka means discrimination; virāgya means dispassion; sampatti means six sādhanas; mumukṣutva means the desire of liberation.

3 *Tattvabodha* was composed by Śaṅkara around the 8th century AD. The original Sanskrit text at the beginning of each paragraph can be found in the translated version by Svarupa Chaitanya (Śaṅkarācārya 1981). The verses in this work are not uniformly numbered and I have used the verse numbers from this translation, from 1.3.1 to 1.3.6 (Śaṅkarācārya 1981).

4 *The Imitation of Christ* was originally written in Medieval Latin as *De Imitatione Christi* around 1418–1427 and first printed in 1471–1472.

5 The author of *Mysticism and Intellect in Medieval Christianity and Buddhism: Ascent and Awakening in Bonaventure and Chinul* demonstrates Bonaventure's views on theology and spirituality. That is, the study of scripture and theology does not interfere with contemplation and spiritual practice (Lee 2020).

[6] *The Soul's Journey into God* was written in Medieval Latin as *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum* in 1259. It is usually translated as *The Soul's Journey into God* or *The Journey of the Mind Into God.*

[7] In *Itinerarium Mentis in Deum*, the title of each chapter summarizes the stages of contemplating God. The original Latin texts can be found in the database Documenta Catholica Omnia.

[8] The tradition of jñāna yoga can be found as early as the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Śaṅkara emphasized the importance of absolute knowledge, so his theory of liberation is also known as jñāna yoga.

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Article

The Similarities and Differences in the Localization of Buddhism and Christianity—Taking the Discussional Strategies and Intellectual Backgrounds of Tertullian's *Apology* and Mou Zi's *Answers to the Skeptics* as Examples †

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† On the translation of Chinese Buddha classics, such as *Li Huo Lun* 理惑论 [*Answers to the Skeptics*], *Hong Ming Ji* 弘明集 [*Spreading the way and Elucidating the Teaching: A Collection of Expiditions Truth*], *Chu Sangzang Ji Ji* 出三藏记集 [*Catalogue of Tripitaka Works Translated into Chinese*], *Shamen Bu Jing Wang Zhe Lun* 沙门不敬王者论 [*Controversy over Shramana's solution to the monarch*] and so on. See 陈观胜, 李培茱编, 中英佛教词典, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, n.d.

Abstract: After the rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire and the introduction of Buddhism into China, Christianity and Buddhism were both faced with the adjustment of the existing society. In the Roman Empire, faced with some censure, apologists began to write articles to clarify misunderstandings and express their beliefs. At the same time, there are similar argumentative documents on Buddhism in China. Their argumentation ideas also have many similarities, such as, firstly, distinguishing them from the original ideas, then using the existing ideas, and finally, actively integrating them into existing society. However, there are some bigger differences in the background of the debate between the Roman Empire and China—Christianity has strong political independence. The most fundamental difference is the atmosphere of the existing ruling ideology—China has been Confucianized, and the political independence of Confucianism is relatively weak. It is this fundamental difference that finally led to the final difference in the development paths of Christianity in the Roman Empire and Buddhism in China, which then affected their historical paths.

Keywords: *Apology*; *Answers to the Skeptics* (理惑论); early Christianity and Greek philosophy; the reconciliation of Buddhism; Taoism and Confucianism

1. Introduction

In the process of an introduction into an alien area of emerging religions, there is bound to be conflict or collision with the original beliefs. For new religions, how to cope with conflict and form an accommodation with established beliefs or cultures is referred to by some scholars as localization. This is a very important matter, and to a large extent, the fate of a religion depends on it. There are a number of such cases in history, of which the rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire and the introduction of Buddhism to China are representative examples.

After the rise of Christianity, the religion was misunderstood and even hostile by non-Christians in the Roman Empire. In order to clarify the misunderstanding and demonstrate the doctrine, so as to avoid persecution and even further spread of Christianity, a group of apologists came into being. This group included Justin Martyr, Aristides, Tatian, Clement of Alexandria, Ignatius, Athenagoras, and Tertullian. As the representative of the guardian, Tertullian's works have the most systematic and typical debate strategy. Tertullian was a Christian writer of Carthage in North Africa during the Roman Empire, known as "the last Greek apologetist and the original Latin defender" (Campenhhausen 1964). He lived in the second half of the 2nd century and the first half of the 3rd century, and he was the son of a centurion of the Roman Empire in North Africa. Originally, he was a

pagan man, and then he converted to Christianity. He studied philosophy, literature, and law, and he practiced certain Greek cultural traditions. Tertullian wrote many apologetic works, of which the *Apology* is typical. In response to the reproaches of the pagans, Tertullian responded with a warlike rebuttal, firstly to demonstrate Christian political loyalty to the empire, secondly to emphasize that Christianity was not independent of Roman tradition and society, and thirdly to demonstrate that Christianity was also a religion of reason and not superstition. He did this to reduce the resistance to the transmission of Christianity and to be better able to preach. The choice of such a debate strategy and topic was based on the arrangement of the previous apologetics documents, as well as their thematic content and debate strategies.

Similarly, when Buddhism came to China, there were many criticisms and diatribes. For the same purpose, that is, to protect and propagate the religion, the Buddhist monk Sang Yo (僧佑) compiled *Spreading the Way and Elucidating the Teaching: A Collection of Expeditions of Truth* (弘明集), the first of which is the *Answers to the Skeptics* (牟子理惑论). It is generally believed that the author of *Answers to the Skeptics* is *Mou Zi* and that it was written in the time of Liu Song Ming Emperor (刘宋明帝); scholar Lu Cheng's (陆澄) *On the Teachings of the Buddha* (法论) also states the following: "the life of Cangwu Taishou Mouzi Bo" (苍梧太守牟子博传), but no specific name is given. *Mou Zi*[1] lived in the late Eastern Han dynasty and had taken refuge in Jiaozhou (交州). He later married in Cangwu, and because of the chaos of the world, he was repeatedly hard to recruit. *Answers to the Skeptics* focuses on the history, personalities, doctrines, and teachings of Buddhism, and it uses Confucian and Taoist concepts to express Buddhism's understanding of its connection to Chinese culture, thus endeavoring to argue for the sanctity, advancement, and reasonableness of Buddhism. In the genre book, the article content adopts the form of questions and answers, which had a certain influence on the genre. In addition, the logic and form of the debate and the main topics of *Spreading the Way and Elucidating the Teaching: A Collection of Expeditions of Truth* generally follow *Answers to the Skeptics*. Therefore, it can represent the process of cultural adjustment when Buddhism was integrated into Chinese culture but did not lose its own characteristics.

Therefore, *Apology* and *Answers to the Skeptics* do not merely reflect the development dilemma and breaking process of foreign cultures after entering a strange cultural circle; instead, these works represent some situations of the conflict and integration of new cultures in communication with existing cultural thoughts, and they also represent the universality of the development of Chinese and Western cultures.

In China, there are some papers on the cultural background of Tertullian, as well as his views on death, belief, soul, and apologetic traditions (Zhang 2001; Lin and Chen 2011; Xu 2003; Wang 2001; Qi 2020); but in the Western sphere, scholars explore the status of Tertullian from the aspects of apologetics' historical traditions, doctrines, literature, influences, and localization of rhetoric (Merrill 1918; Lehmann 1959; Keresztes 1966; Barnes 1971; Sider 1971, 2001; Burrows 1988; Rives 1994; Rankin 1995; Osborn 2001; Dunn 2004; Wilhite 2007; Willert 2014). At the same time, Chinese scholars have also conducted a detailed analysis of *Answers to the Skeptics* from the aspects of the authenticity, edition, age of writing, author, and name changes[2]; there are also related discussions on the reflection of Confucian and Taoist thoughts and the process and characteristics of the Sinicization of Buddhism (Liu 2007; Mao and Tang 2013; Wang 2015; Wu 2016). There is still room for further research from the perspective of debate strategy. Compared with China, Western scholars have published less research on *Answers to the Skeptics*.[3] In collecting source materials, the author of this article did not find a comparative study of the similarities and differences between Tertullian's *Apology* and *Mou Zi*'s *Answers to the Skeptics*.[4] Therefore, this article tries to compare the similarities and differences between the two arguments through examples in order to understand the differences in religious thought between China and the West.

2. Divide First and Then Unite—Similarities between the Argumentative Strategies of *Apology* and *Answers to the Skeptics*

2.1. The Distinction from the Pre-Existing Thought

At the beginning of Christianity, the people of Rome could not accurately distinguish between Christianity and Judaism. So in order for Christianity to develop, the apologists had to distinguish themselves as separate from Judaism after initially utilizing it. This is the logical starting point of *Apology*.

"The Jewish people has deviated the path of God" is the basic starting point and foothold of the Christians' comments on the Jews; Christianity, in order to be independent and develop, had to break away from the yoke of Judaism, or be cut off from Judaism, and define its own characteristics in order to not be confused with Judaism. In *Apology*, first, Tertullian emphasizes "nor do we have any different thoughts of God" (Tertullian 1950, p. 61). Immediately after speaking of the Jews' former glory, the pen turns and writes that they are in "sin" because they "refuse to admit" their mistakes, and this is because they believe that the savior has not come, which leads to their great dispersion (Tertullian 1950, pp. 61–62). And Christians believe that Christ is the savior, the god, the Lord, master, and "the Enlightener and Guide of the human race" (Tertullian 1950, p. 62) because "with a word He drove evil spirits from men, gave sight again, to the blind, cleansed lepers, healed paralytics, and finally, by a word, restored the dead to life; He reduced to obedience the very elements of nature, calming storms, walking upon the water" (Tertullian 1950, pp. 64–65). Christ, however, was regarded by the Jews as a "charlatan" and was even killed based on this view. Therefore, whether Jesus Christ is the savior is the most fundamental difference between the two religions. Moreover, in order to further illustrate the divinity of his religion, Tertullian set the founder of Judaism as Moses; Moses is a man, and the divinity of man is not the divine nature of God. In this way, Christianity was presented as different from Judaism and superior to Judaism.

When Buddhism was introduced to China, its practice included some of the Taoist rituals, and at that time, Taoism's fairy magic was very popular, which made it difficult for the upper classes to differentiate between Taoism and Buddhism; thus, Buddhism gained trust along with Taoism. At that time, Emperor Huan of the Han dynasty and Ying, King of Chu (楚王英), respected Buddhism but did not understand the Buddhist teachings. The purpose of Buddhist worship is longevity and profit. And Buddhism often calls itself "Chinese" ("华人") under the guise of Taoism. In addition, most famous Buddhist monks hide their teachings and do not talk about miracles; rather, they speak of cause and effect to win people's hearts. In short, Buddhism and Taoism are very similar in procedure and form, and even in some concepts.

However, with the development of Buddhism, the consciousness of Buddhist independence began to strengthen; therefore, it became necessary to draw a clear line between Buddhism and Taoism. As the earliest Buddhist paper in China, *Answers to the Skeptics* undertook this important task. As indicated by *Mou Zi*, "Buddha's words of awareness" and "the Tao's words of nothingness" (Seng 2013, pp. 14–15) illustrate the fundamental differences between the two religions in concepts and words. And later on, *Mou Zi* wrote that "Buddhists take medicine and acupuncture even when they're sick" (Seng 2013, p. 54). This is another distinction from the Taoists. Moreover, *Mou Zi* said "The Buddhists say everyone dies. No one can avoid it" (Seng 2013, p. 60). Even Yao (尧), Shun (舜), Yu (禹), Bo Yi (伯夷), Shu Qi (叔齐), Zhou Wen Wang (周文王), Wu Wang (周武王), Zhou Gong (周公), Confucius, and so on, did not live to be a hundred years old, and Zi Lu (子路), Zeng Sen (曾参), and Yan Yuan (颜渊) talked about life having an end (Seng 2013, p. 61). This is different from what Taoism says: "Yao, Shun, Zhou Gong, and Confucius, and the seventy-two disciples of Confucius, all immortalized immortality" (Seng 2013, p. 60). *Mou Zi* also considered these statements to be "demonic and delusional words". As for daily life, Buddhists abstain from wine and meat and eat grains, unlike Taoists who do not eat grains but consume wine and meat (Seng 2013, p. 52). Someone asked the following question: "Wang Qiao (王乔) and Chi Songzi (赤松子) both became immortals and

wrote a 170-volume book, which tells of the ways in which immortals live forever, is this the same as what the Buddhist scriptures say?" The answer was as follows: "To compare these books with the Buddhist scriptures is, in terms of quality, like comparing the five hegemonic lords of the time of Chun Qiu (春秋五霸) with rulers of Chinese remote antiquity (三皇五帝), or the Yang Huo (阳货) of the state of Lu in the time of Chun Qiu with Confucius; in terms of form, it is like comparing a small hill with a high mountain, or a small stream with a great river and a great sea; and in terms of literary excellence, it is like comparing a tiger's skin without hair with a sheep's skin, or coarse clothing and linen with brocade. In terms of honor and generosity, despite Taoism has ninety-six spells, it can not still match for the Buddhist spells. Although the Taoist book is written in many words and sprawling, one can not get the gist of it, that's why Buddhists think they don not work. That's why you don't use this method and despise it. How can these two types of books have the same impact and effect?" (Seng 2013, pp. 50–51).

2.2. The Use of the Pre-Existing Ideas

An important reason why two originally different cultures can eventually intermingle is that one culture adapts by adjusting itself to the other, thus becoming similar or comparable, but not identical. This exchange and diffusion between heterogeneous cultures is the driving force behind cultural development because the exchange and diffusion of cultures inevitably lead to the expansion of cultural systems and contact with heterogeneous cultures. Moreover, there is an export and import of cultures, which propels the development of cultures. This is called "inclusion". This kind of inclusion is embodied in the use of original ideas and the active integration of ideas into society.

If Tertullian's former argument was more about clarifying misunderstandings and seeking legal status, the latter two arguments were designed to integrate into Roman society and achieve spiritual dominance. In general, Tertullian uses rational logic and Greek philosophical terms, but he does not believe them; instead, he sees them as bridges to make their debate more powerful and valid.[5] The Bible is the source of faith, but its content must be argued to convince society of its merit; therefore, rational logic comes in handy. Moreover, Tertullian used methods of logic and rational argumentation very similar to the Stoics and even the Neoplatonists (Waszink 1955). Specifically, in the face of accusations against infanticide, incest, and bloodlust, Tertullian's logical starting point is to assume that Christianity is a mysterious organization that never leaks to outsiders and firmly believes in it, and this judgment is given to Christians by outside believers. If so, how do outsiders know the actions of Christians? Moreover, because Christians do not eat blood or internal organs, and do not eat animals that die by suffocation or die naturally, infanticide and sacrifice are even more nonsense than greater sins. Even reason can blame non-Christians in turn, because "How is it that, when you are confident that they will shudder at the blood of an animal, you believe they will pant eagerly after human blood? Is it, perchance, that you have found the latter more to your taste?" (Tertullian 1950, 9: 14, p. 33). All of these argument methods reflect the absorption and utilization of Greek philosophy by Tertullian.

In addition, in order to secure a public trial, it is against justice and logic to allow those who are truly guilty to plead without the Christians. This is also where Tertullian uses rational logic. Trajan, when debriefed by Pliny Jr., said "men of this kind should not be sought out, but, when brought to court, they should be punished" (Tertullian 1950, 2: 7, p. 11). This also seems to be inconsistent with logic to Tertullian, because punishment indicates guilt, but then it is not pursued; conversely, if it is not pursued, it indicates innocence, so why would innocence be punished? This is where the contradictions come to arise. In this way, Tertullian thinks this is playing with Roman law (Tertullian 1950, 2: 8–11, pp. 11–12).

In the treatment of the Roman gods, if there are many gods, then the creators of these gods are a problem; therefore, with the following argument, Tertullian confirmed that the polygods of Rome are not worthy of respect because they are the creature, not the creator, that is, not the original one, and the original one is God. He went on to point to the artifi-

cial gods, stating that the king was above the gods, but still below God. In fact, the logical starting point of Tertullian is that Christians are people who believe and have a high moral level. Only by convincing people of Christianity, can Greek philosophy and logical reason work. Therefore, we can see that Tertullian has used the logical reasoning of Greek philosophy everywhere to demonstrate the existence of God and the rationality of the social order at that time. That is to say, in Tertullian's view, sensibility is lower than the reason purpose of Greek philosophy, which is to serve faith. This "emphasizes the role of reason on the one hand and the fundamental role of faith; the recognition of classical philosophy and the transcendence of Christianity" (Wu 2018). Therefore, it can be said that Tertullian's Christianity is "Platonized Christianity" and goes beyond Platonism.

Liang Qichao's remarks on the convergence of Confucianism and Buddhism during the Han and Wei dynasties stated that "The starting point of Sakyamuni's teachings is that there is no fathers and no rulers, which is in conflict with all the traditional doctrines and political systems of our country. After importation, if it remains unchanged for a long time, it will certainly be difficult to preserve" (Liang 2001). Tang Yongtong also said, "Since the rise of the Han Dynasty, Confucianism has been the mainstay of Chinese academia and the middle and lower regions of the Yellow river of China (中原) has been the mainstay of Chinese culture. In the beginning, foreign religions were still attached to the prophecy of yin and yang (阴阳), in order to fight for their own place among the many religious cultures." In the first chapter of *Spreading the Way and Elucidating the Teaching: A Collection of Expeditions of Truth*, that is, *Answers to the Skeptics*, the trend of the blending of Confucianism and Buddhism has emerged. *Answers to the Skeptics* cited Confucius nine times, which shows how familiar the author was with the Confucian classics. As a young man, *Mou Zi* "read extensively the classical works of Confucianism and the books of other schools, both long and short, and there was nothing he would not read" (Seng 2013, p. 6). This shows that Buddhism was in deep communication with Confucianism at a very early stage. Buddhism's first task was to define itself before one could argue that Buddhism was not in conflict with Confucianism. *Mou Zi* said that "Buddha is an honorific title for the dead, just like rulers of Chinese remote antiquity" (Seng 2013, p. 14). Furthermore, *Mou Zi* found similarities between the Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation and the Confucian doctrine of the immortality of the soul and the wheel of retribution: "Q. The Buddha said, 'A man should rise again from the dead.' I do not believe that this is true either. *Mou Zi* answers: A man has just died and his family returns to the roof to shout his name. The man was already dead, who was he calling out to in this way? Someone said: Calling out his soul. *Mou Zi* asked: If the spirit and soul of a man come back, the man will come back to life; if it does not come back, then where will it go? Said: Then it will become ghosts and gods. *Mou Zi* said: It is so. The spirit and soul of man do not die, only the body decays. The body is like the roots and leaves of the grains, and the spirit is like the seeds of the grains; the roots and leaves must have grown and withered, but the seeds do not become extinct, and so it is with a man who has attained the Way; though the body dies, the spirit lives on forever" (Seng 2013, p. 27). *Mou Zi* also refuted the Taoist saying of immortality by using the births and deaths of Yao, Shun, Yu, Bo Yi, Shu Qi, Zhou Wen Wang, Zhou Wu Wang, Zhou Gong, and Confucius, Zi Lu, Zeng Can, and Yan Yuan (Seng 2013, pp. 60–61). When asked rhetorically if he could not say anything about Buddhist service (佛事) without having been to the Western regions, *Mou Zi* again used the examples of Confucius, Yan Yuan, and Zi Gong to illustrate that the shadows of things can be observed even though the shapes of the things have not been seen (Seng 2013, pp. 56–57). Finally, the reproach of others also involved *Mou Zi*'s utilization of Confucian thought. Somebody asked: "You once said that the Buddhist scriptures are as vast as a sea of beautiful and elegant words, so why don not you use the language of the Buddhist scriptures, but instead use the *Shijing* and the *Shangshu* to answer my question? Could it be that the differences between the two are also seen as similarities?" (Seng 2013, p. 47). All these reflect the Buddhist use of Confucian classics and doctrines. By examining the doctrinal theories of Buddhism, we are able to see that

Buddhism adopted a smooth approach in order to overcome the maladaptive nature of dissemination and enriched the Buddhist classics by invoking Confucianism into Buddhism.

It was found that the integration of Confucianism and Buddhism was the way for Buddhism, as an alien religion, to gain legitimacy. Thus, in exploring this topic, it is important to note that Buddhists often defend themselves with a logic of argument that is ostensibly different from Confucianism but actually the same. But ultimately, Buddhism must integrate with Confucianists, which is reflected in reconciliation with the secular world.

2.3. Actively Integrate into the Pre-Existing Society

Tertullian not only defended Christians from legal charges but also presented a positive argument against the Roman indictment—an emphasis on the constructive role of Christianity in and for Roman society. As a member of Roman society, Tertullian was not opposed to taxes and advocated taxation for "good faith" (Tertullian 1950, 42: 8–9, pp. 107–8). He also mentioned that "we disdain no fruit of His works" (Tertullian 1950, 42: 2, p. 106) and live with the heretics. With regard to his assembly, he argued that it was not a "gang", but a mutual aid group that cared for widows, widowers, orphans, the infirm, and the sick, so that the basic order of life, such as funerals and education, could be maintained (Tertullian 1950, 39: 6, p. 99). As for the loss of his own religion, he hoped to succeed by practicing pious prayer (Tertullian 1950, 43: 2, p. 108). Therefore, he did not stubbornly oppose and flee passively to Roman society and culture, but entered into society and prompted it to change. In addition to refuting the charges against Christianity, he also volunteered, arguing that many people who looked loyal to the emperor were traitors to murder the emperor, and not one of these rebels was a Christian (Tertullian 1950, 35: 8–13, pp. 92–93).

And among the objects of his prayers, the emperor was at the top of the list. He wrote "For, in our case, we pray for the welfare of the emperors to the eternal God, the true God, the living God," and "We are the same toward the emperors as we are toward our neighbors. For, to desire evil, to do evil, to speak evil, to think evil of anyone—all are equally forbidden to us. Whatever we may not do to the emperor, we may not do to anyone else" (Tertullian 1950, 31: 1, p. 85; 36: 4, p. 94). He also mentioned that "We ask for them long life, undisturbed power, security at home, brave armies, a faithful Senate, an upright people, a peaceful world, and everything for which a man or a Caesar prays (Tertullian 1950, 30: 4, p. 86)." Tertullian even thought of the continuation of the empire, and the Christians were praying (Tertullian 1950, 32: 3, p. 88). And in contrast with the people who seemed loyal to the emperor, Tertullian said more firmly that every day, the Emperor is blessed with dignity and holiness; we Christians have more reason to say that the Emperor is our emperor because he is our God's sent, and we care more about him; and "there is one kind of concern shown in uneasiness about one's family; another, about one's enslavement" (Tertullian 1950, 35: 1, p. 90; 33: 1–2, pp. 88–89; 35: 13, p. 93). In addition, Christians are free from rebellion and regicide.

"On Destroying three important Things" (三破论) refers to "destroying one's body", (破身) "family", (破家) and "country" (破国). This is an attack by the scholars of that time on the behavior of Buddhism, which was different from that of the Chinese tradition. In ancient China, *Xiao Jing* says, "The body, hair and skin, received by the parents, do not dare to destroy," and loyalty to the king and love of the country, filial piety, and respect for elders are also daily ethical requirements, and marrying a wife and having children is also a necessary path in life. Therefore, China is a country that pays great attention to blood relations and human morality. However, Buddhists still were leaving their homes without honoring the king and without paying homage to their parents, did not marry and have no heirs, and met their friends without the appropriate etiquette, which was a great shock to the existing social order. Against this onslaught, Buddhism defends itself from the dichotomy between form and substance. Specifically, although Buddhism advocates shaving one's hair, it is considered to be a trivial matter: "Wives, children, and property, are not worth holding on to" (Seng 2013, p. 23); these are mere forms, and not detrimental

to the substance, so long as the motives are noble. He also discussed in detail the examples of someone in Qi (齐国) who grabbed his father's hair to save his life, Confucius who praised Tai Bo (泰伯) for cutting his hair, Yu Jean (豫让) who swallowed charcoal and became mute, Nie Zheng (聂政) who destroyed his face, Bo Ji (伯姬) who was burned to death because she kept her chastity rather than leave the room where the fire started, and Gao Xing (高行), a widow, who destroyed her face and defended herself in the face of a forced marriage to illustrate that the behaviors of Buddhists do not go against the norms of society (Seng 2013, p. 21). The article goes on to say, "If one has high morals, one can refrain from dwelling on the trivial matters of life. Shramana (沙门) can be said to be humble to the core by abandoning their families and possessions, giving up their wives and children, and eliminating sex, so how can one say that their behavior is contrary to the words of the sages or inconsistent with filial piety" (Seng 2013, p. 21). Later, he used the criticality of the situation to decide whether or not to break with common sense and give a hand to his drowning sister-in-law (Seng 2013, p. 31). Although Buddhists are criticized for their celibacy and considered unfilial, they see it as a return to a pristine life, free from worldly temptations: "It's the most polite thing to do" (Seng 2013, p. 23). Similarly, although Confucianism emphasizes that "appearance is the first of the five things" and "clothing is the beginning of the three virtues", and has a contemptuous or even denigrating attitude towards Buddhists who "are covered with a red cloth, eat once a day, and are closed to their six passions" (Seng 2013, p. 38), "shave their hair and are covered with a red cloth, and do not kneel and worship when they see others" (Seng 2013, p. 25), Buddhism argues that this is a manifestation of the fact that they "have their own will" and do not care about indulging in worldly materialistic pleasures, but rather are content to live in poverty and contentment, as well as a manifestation of the fact that they do not attach importance to outward form, but rather focus on inward substance (Seng 2013, p. 38). At the same time, it is used to show that the behavior of Buddhists is a sign of simplicity due to the fact that people in ancient times also acted in the same way (Seng 2013, p. 25). *Mou Zi* then concludes, "One should look at the big things rather than the small things…… (so that his) father and country will be blessed, and those who have grudges against him will not be able to find a place to lay their hands on him; and he will eventually become a Buddha, and his parents and brothers will all be saved and his parents and brothers will also be liberated." There is still a rhetorical question: "If it is not filial piety, is not benevolent, which is benevolent and filial?" (Seng 2013, p. 32). This is why Buddhists do not only do good to one person or one family, but to all people, families, and nations, and the latter is true "filial piety". In response to the misunderstanding that Buddhism "destroys the family", *Mou Zi* used the fact that Bo Yi and Shu Qi died of starvation on Shouyang Mountain (首阳山) without any descendants to illustrate that marrying and having children is not an inevitable choice for people. Arguing that if the Buddhists drink and eat meat, have wives and children, make money, deliver delusional speeches, and other practices it would "destroy the country", *Mou Zi* held that Buddhism can only regulate the behavior of people's thoughts, but cannot be specific to the real-time norms of each person; in addition, these people are not real Buddhists, followed by analogies, examples, and other ways of argumentation. In short, a Buddhist "can serve his relatives at home, rule his people in his country, and rule himself independently" (Seng 2013, p. 16). *Mou Zi*'s defense strategy can still be seen in later Buddhist apologetics, such as in Hui Yuan (慧远)'s *Controversy over Shramana's solution to the monarch*, in which he divides believers into those who are at home and those who have left home, with the former having to kneel and worship the king because of their compliance with secular norms and rituals; the latter actually kneel even though they do not kneel. This is an act of grace for the world. When someone slanders a Buddhist for participating in an uprising against the ruler, the believer argues that Buddhists "lead with compassion, do not kill the faithful, do not show off their integrity, and do not steal". This means that, as soon as people touch a weapon, he or she is no longer Buddhist, let alone mob rebels.[6]

Someone mentioned that "*Mou zi* skillfully transformed the conflict of the Buddhists' unruly behavior in the eyes of the people at that time into a conflict of concepts, and then

picked up classic quotations from the Confucian and Taoist classics to explain them, so that in the end, everything that the Shamans did was sensible and reasonable and conformed to the principles of Confucianism and Taoism, and the people who questioned their behavior became irrational instead" (Tang et al. 2014). Put briefly, in the view of Buddhists, substance is higher than form, and the differences in form between Buddhism and Confucianism do not affect the similarities in substance. This multi-level, multi-angle, and all-round communication and intermingling together promote the development of Buddhism and Chinese tradition in a close-knit manner.

However, the textual similarities are only literal; it is the larger differences that ultimately led to the differences between Christianity and Buddhism in Rome and China, and the reason for these differences is the different cultural contexts in which the two existed; therefore, it is necessary to explore the question of the environment in which the two existed.

3. Differences between the Backgrounds of *Apology* and *Answers to the Skeptics*

3.1. The Difference between Christianity and Confucianism in the Relationship between Politics and Religion

Since Christianity eventually replaced polytheism within the Roman Empire and had a significant impact on subsequent historical developments, the Roman Empire is based on Christianity rather than polytheism in contextual considerations. Similarly, even though Buddhism was introduced to China and played a major role, the official school and the main dominant ideology in China was still Confucianism; therefore, in contextual considerations, China still used Confucianism as a point of reference.

Christianity has maintained its essential independence in its history. In the early days of Christianity, the religion emphasized that one should "Give back to Caesar's and to God what is God's."(*Mark*, 12: 17.) This shows that inner faith remains paramount and primary. Furthermore, Jesus was on trial: "We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to Messiah, a King."(*Luke*, 23: 2) The same statement is found in "We must obey God rather than human beings."(*Acts*, 5: 29) Although the emperor was an emperor, higher than the "gods", he was still a created being whose power came from God, so he could not be regarded as the same as God. At the same time, Jesus also said, "My Kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leader. However, now my kingdom is from another place."(*John*, 18: 36) Therefore, "Everywhere in the New Testament is a sense of distance from power" (John 1996).

However, Buddhism entered China ruled by Confucianism, so the relationship between Confucianism and politics inevitably provided a large ideological environment. Confucianism was closely associated with politics from the very beginning of its existence: "Those who are in politics should act with fairness and justice" and "You want to do good and the people will do good." *Lun Yu* (论语) also said, "To govern with virtue is like the North Star, which resides in its place and is arched by all the stars" and "With the decree to govern the people, with the criminal law to straighten them out, the people only want to be able to avoid being punished for their crimes, but there is no sense of shame; with the moral guidance of the people, with the rites of assimilation, the people will not only have the sense of shame, but also have the heart of return to the service."(*Lun Yu, Wei Zheng* 论语·为政) These few sentences centered on the political views of Confucius. Therefore, there is no doubt that Confucius' doctrine is more strongly bonded to politics. In addition, Mencius said of the doctrine of "benevolent government" that "Those who practise benevolent government have no enemies. Your Majesty, please do not be in doubt!"(*Mencius, Part two of Liang Huiwang* (孟子·梁惠王上) as "He who relies on force and pretends to be benevolent can be a hegemon……he who relies on morality and enforces benevolence can be a king."(*Mencius, Part one of Gongsun Chou* 孟子·公孙丑上) Xun Zi, who followed in his footsteps, also said the following: "Rites and Laws should be applied in parallel" and that "the king and the hegemony should be used in parallel"; "The monarch who honours pro-

priety and justice and respects the virtuous will be king; the monarch who values the law and loves the people will be hegemonic; the monarch who loves profit and often engages in fraud will be dangerous; and the monarch who plays with power and intrigue, tilts against and frames people, and is sinister will perish"(*Xun Zi, Da Lüe* 荀子·大略); "The countries in heaven that follow the rituals are well governed, and those that do not follow the rituals are in chaos; those that follow the rituals are stable, and those that do not follow the rituals are in danger; those that follow the rituals will exist, and those that do not follow the rituals will perish"(*Xun Zi, Li Lun* 荀子·礼论); "This conquest of tyrants to punish the culprits is a great political achievement. That those who kill are put to death, and those who injure are punished, is the same for all the emperors of the ages"(*Xun Zi, Zheng Lun* 荀子·正论); and "The king is the boat, and the people are the water. The water could carry the boat and overturns it. This is what is meant by this."(*Xun Zi, Fu Guo* 荀子·富国) In a word, Confucianism involves many aspects of political rule, such as rites and music education, punishment, military affairs, finance, systems, and so on. After Confucianism was established as a monopoly by the Han dynasty, those who studied Confucianism gradually became Confucian scholars, and they were more completely subjugated to the regime. Although Confucianism in China has always existed as a mainstream and official ideology, it has never formed an organization independent of the government, and it has not been able to be organized, institutionalized, or materialized. This is because the rites of sacrificing to heaven, ancestors, and Confucius were mostly participated in by the emperor, who was the representative of politics. All the scholars of the Imperial College eventually entered the governmental offices, and the work of the governmental institutions at all levels, such as helping the poor, education, charity, and the maintenance of the social order, was mainly accomplished by the officials, and so on.

3.2. Differences in the Existence of the Pre-Existing Thoughts

In the Republic and early Empire, Rome pursued a policy of religious toleration, meaning that politics did not care much about differences in religious denominations and doctrines, and so was generally able to accommodate foreign religions into the Roman pantheon, such as the Greek god Zeus becoming the Roman god Jupiter, Athena becoming Minerva, and Aphrodite becoming Venus, and even Isis from Egypt and Mithras from Persia. Protectors of regions and cities were also honored; Athena always protected Athens and Althemis always protected Ephesus. After his accession to the throne, Octavian continued his policy of religious "toleration", while at the same time promoting the ancient religion of Rome, repairing temples, and restoring festivals. Most importantly, he created the cult of the Principle in the 2nd and early 3rd centuries; coins issued by cities throughout Asia Minor accurately showed the exact shape of the temples and statues of their local gods. This environment of religious tolerance gave Christianity the opportunity to spread widely. When Christianity was in its infancy, the Imperial Government was a mere spectator, neutral in the controversy between Christianity and Judaism. Even if there was persecution, it was only temporary and localized. In the late Empire, even Symmachus the Elder, whom St. Ambrose had so bitterly denigrated in the "Altar of Victory Controversy,"[7] was not opposed to privileging Christianity, but only to preserving the old traditions. So while religious diversity was the norm in the ancient Roman world, this zero-sum game of Christianity versus polytheism was a product of the bigotry of later generations of scholars and the result of focusing on believing the writings of Christian scholars. Moreover, although contemporary researchers often emphasize Christianity's absorption of both the philosophy of the Hellenistic era and the spirit of Roman religion, Christianity eventually entered the empire as an independent, state religion. It is for this reason that Christianity was able to maintain its independence even when it was established as the state religion by political rulers, even to the extent of absolutely punishing emperors, such as Ambrose, who absolutely punished the Roman Emperor Theodosius the Great for the massacre of civilians by the Roman army. At the social level, Christians and the church also undertook social relief, order maintenance, controlled sacrifice, and other political activities that orig-

inally belonged to the empire. The most important thing is that Christianity, because of its doctrines, has formed organized and physical institutions that are able to perform various functions. This is the most different point between Christianity and Confucianism, and it is this point that has had an important impact on the subsequent history.

Unlike the state of religion during the Roman period, China did not have a religion in the Western sense during the Han dynasty but had established a ruling ideology—Confucianism.[8] Whether it was Taoism, which appeared locally at the end of the Eastern Han dynasty, or Buddhism, which was imported from outside, they could only adapt to Confucianism and accept its dominance. This situation can be seen everywhere in *Answers to the Skeptics*. At the beginning of the introduction of *Mou Zi*, it is said that he "studied both the Confucian classics and the doctrines of various scholars", but also "often questioned others with the Five Classics, and none of the Taoist was able to match or over him" (Seng 2013, pp. 6–7). When asked about the title of Buddha, he said, "The Buddha is also a title, as rulers of Chinese remote antiquity." This is also an example of lecturing with the help of traditional Chinese deification. In the face of the reproach, speaking directly to the point, *Mou Zi*, based on the example of Confucius, stated that "Confucius does not think that the Five Classics have been completed, and wrote *Chun Qiu* and the *Xiao Jing*" (Seng 2013, p. 18). In response to the Buddha's thirty-two faces and eighty good qualities that are different from those of ordinary people, *Mou zi* also cites examples, such as "Yao's eyebrows have eight colors, Shun's eyes have double pupils"; "Zhou Wenwang had four breasts, Zhou Gong was hunched over"; and "Fu Xi (伏羲) had a nose like that of a dragon, the top of Confucius' (仲尼) head was high in all directions with the middle being low, and Lao Zi's forehead was high and raised, and he was born with a double bridge of the nose, and there were ten kinds of stripes on the palms of his hands and the palms of his feet" (Seng 2013, p. 20).

4. Conclusions

In general, any new culture will be misunderstood when they initially enter the existing cultural circle, and it is normal that they are forced to make various adjustments to relieve their discomfort. Take Christianity, for example, both Greek philosophy and Judaism are used as tools to argue that Christianity is the only correct and just religion. As Mark Burrows said, "Tertullian's 'audience,' therefore, is not only that of the 'magistrates of the Roman empire,' as he claims at the outset. Rather, he is here entering into discourse with a diverse gathering of outstanding historians, encyclopedists, and rhetors of antiquity, including Varro and Tacitus, Cicero and Quintilian, and, of course, Josephus" (Burrows 1988). Whether he was fiercely discerning the differences in Judaism or using the rational logic of Greek philosophical discourse, his sole purpose was to argue for the justification of the existence of Christianity. This is also due to the fact that Christianity was in a growth period and did not have much power to completely deviate from the existing network of ideas. The same is true in *Answers to the Skeptics*. Although the author opposed Taoism and challenged the position of Confucianism, the confluence of the three religions in the Tang dynasty was manifested in respecting the king and worshiping the integration of Confucianism. The relationship between the three religions struggles but is unbroken. Meanwhile, the argumentation strategy of Buddhism demonstrated in history is to distinguish the differences from Taoism, then demonstrate its uniqueness and superiority, and finally integrate it into Confucianism.

However, the fundamental reason for the difference between the two is the different ruling ideas. To be specific, first, Confucianism is more politically dependent and less independent than Christianity. In addition, Confucianism had already been completed in the Han dynasty and was deeply involved in politics, and other ideas could only be adapted into the existing culture. Of course, Confucianism would also make certain adjustments, but its orthodoxy and subject status cannot be doubted. Second, Christianity became the state religion, and Confucianism became the "state religion" of China, which is also the background difference between Chinese culture and Occidental culture. Third, it is the

difference between Christianity and Confucianism in the understanding of the relationship between politics and religion and the existing ideological and cultural background that has had a greater effect on the historical development of religions, which finally led to the status of Christian theocracy in medieval Western Europe being higher than that of Confucianism in medieval China.

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Notes

1 In the remaining content of *Catalogue of Tripitaka Works Translated into Chinese*, Vol. 12, that is, *the teachings of the Buddha* written by Lu Cheng of the Liusong dynasty, *Answers to the Skeptics* has this title: "the life of Cangwu Taishou Mouzi Bo", but no specific name is provided. In *Collection of catalogue of books* by *Sui shu* (隋书·经籍志), however, the author changes to "wrote by Taiwei of Han dynasty Mou Rong" ("汉太尉牟融撰"), and *Old Tang Shu* (旧唐书) and *New Tang Shu* (新唐书) follow this statement. As far as the circulation of the engraved *Spreading the Way and Elucidating the Teaching: A Collection of Expeditions of Truth* is concerned, The Ming version does not say the author is Mou Rong, but the note includes "Mou Rong of Han dynasty" ("汉牟融"), another note is "the life of Cangwu Taishou Mouzi Bo" ("一云苍梧太守牟子博传"). In the last years of the Ming dynasty, Hu Yinglin (胡应麟) pointed out that the author is not Mou Rong in *Correction of errors of Si Bu* (四部正讹); furthermore, he thought that this book is a forgery. In the Qing dynasty, Sun Xingyan (孙星衍) let his student Hong Yixuan (洪颐煊) make textual criticism, but the outcome was still uncertain, barely following the above statement. See 弘明集, 2013, 僧佑 ed. *Interposation and noted by Li Xiaorong* 李小荣笺注, 上海: 上海古籍出版社, p. 7, 笺注一; 洪颐煊. 2001. *Preface of Mou Zi* (牟子序). In *Newly Edition of unfinished Manuscript of Mou Zi* (牟子丛残新编), collected and written by 周叔迦, newly edited by 周绍良. 北京: 中国书店, pp. 73–74; *Mou Zi's Answers to the Skeptics* (牟子理惑论), 2020. Noted and translated by 梁庆寅, 北京: 东方出版社, pp. 5–7. This article does not explore this but only follows the customary use of "Mou Zi" in italics.

2 *Mou Zi's Answers to the Skeptics* is generally regarded as *Mou Zi* (牟子); "Li Huo" ("理惑") was found in the preface. In modern times, Sun Yirang (孙诒让), Liang Qichao (梁启超), Lü Cheng (吕澂), and Chen Yuan (陈垣) all hold that this book is a forgery. Yet Liang Qichao and Lü Cheng thought this article was written between the Jin and Song dynasties, see Sun Yirang 孙诒让: Postscript of Mou Zi's Answers to the Skeptics 牟子理惑论书后, *Newly Edition of unfinished Manuscript of Mou Zi* (牟子丛残新编), pp. 75–76; Liang Qichao 梁启超: *Distinguish between true and false of Mou Zi's Answers to the Skeptics* (《牟子理惑论》辨伪), *Newly Edition of unfinished Manuscript of Mou Zi* (牟子丛残新编), pp. 77–80; Lü Cheng 吕澂: *A brief introduction to the origins of Chinese Buddhism* (中国佛学源流略讲), 北京: 中华书局, 1979, pp. 25–27. Liu Shipei 刘师培, Tang Yongtong 汤用彤, Ren Jiyu 任继愈, Yu Jiaxi 余嘉锡, Hu Shi 胡适, and Zhou Shujia 周叔迦 hold an opposing view. See Liu Shipei 刘师培: *Guo Xue Fa Wei* (国学发微), punctuate and proofread by Zhang Jinghua 张京华点校, 上海: 华东师范大学出版社, 2015, p. 57; Tang Yongtong 汤用彤: *Buddhist history of Han, Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties(Enlarged and revised volume)* (汉魏两晋南北朝佛教史(增订本)), 北京: 北京大学出版社, 2011, pp. 71–72; Ren Jiyu 任继愈: *The History of China Buddhism* (中国佛教史) Vol. 1, 北京: 中国社会科学出版社, 1985, pp. 188–230; Yu Jiaxi 余嘉锡: Examination of Mou Zi's Answers to the Skeptics (牟子理惑论检讨), *Newly Edition of unfinished Manuscript of Mou Zi* (牟子丛残新编), pp. 115–44; Hu Shi 胡适: *Complete works of Hu Shi* (胡适全集) (第24集): Answer to Chen Yuan (答陈垣), 06. 04. 1933, pp. 157–60; Hu Shi 胡适: *Complete works of Hu Shi* (胡适全集) (第25集): Write to Zhou Yiliang (致周一良), 07. 08. 1948, pp. 350–55; Hu Shi 胡适: *The Third Letter of Hu Shi to Zhou Shujia about Mou Zi* (与周叔迦论牟子三书), *Newly Edition of unfinished Manuscript of Mou Zi* (牟子丛残新编), pp. 85–89; this also includes the opinion of Zhou Yiliang (周一良). Zhou Yiliang regards *Mou Zi's Answers to the Skeptics* as originally a Taoist work. Also see Zhou Yiliang 周一良: The Research of The Times Mou Zi's Answers to the Skeptics (《牟子理惑论》时代考), 周一良著: *Historical essays on Wei, Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties* (魏晋南北朝史论集), 北京: 北京大学出版社, 2010, 2nd, pp. 259–71; Zhou Shujia 周叔迦: *Discussion with Liang Qichao about Mou Zi distinguishing true and false* (梁任公牟子辨伪之商榷), *Newly Edition of unfinished Manuscript of Mou Zi* (牟子丛残新编), pp. 81–84. On the version spread, name change, and recent research review, see *Spreading the Way and Elucidating the Teaching: A Collection of Expeditions of Truth* (弘明集), edited by Seng Yo 僧佑 (编): Interposition and noted by Li Xiaorong 李小荣笺注, 上海: 上海古籍出版社, 2013, pp. 6–7, interposition and note one 笺注一;

3 伯希和 *(Pelliot): Resaerch on Mou Zi* (牟子考), In *Newly Edition of unfinished Manuscript of Mou Zi* (牟子丛残新编), pp. 91–114; Erik Zürcher. 1972. *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, Leiden: Brill, p. 19. The appendix at the back of *Mou Zi's Answers to the Skeptics* has the article of Fukui, Kōjun (福井康顺), see *Mou Zi's Answers to the Skeptics*, pp. 7–13, 159–81, 193–98.

4 There are some researchers who have used the comparative method, but the focus does not overlap with this paper. See Jiang Zhejie 蒋哲杰. 2012. *Cultural and linguistic activities in Wei, Jin, Six Dynasties and late Rome* (魏晋六朝与晚期罗马的文化语言活动). PHD, 华东师范大学, 上海, 中国.

5 H. Richard Niebuhr clarified the relationship between Christian belief and culture into five categories and Tertullian is classified as the opposite category between belief and culture. See H. Richard Niebuhr. 1951. *Christ and Culture*, New York: Harper & Row, pp. 45–82. However, there are also studies that show that Tertullian has a harmony between faith and reason, see also Paul Tillich. 1968. *A Complete History of Christian Thought*, New York: Harper & Row, Pt. 1, p. 38; he thinks Tertullian "has a strong rational mind".

6 See *on Correction* (正诬论), in *Spreading the Way and Elucidating the Teaching: A Collection of Expeditions of Truth* (弘明集), edited by Seng Yo 僧佑 (编), p. 85.

7 When Symmachus took over the post of Praetorian Prefect of Rome in 384, his initial action was to try to revoke an order that had been issued two years earlier by the court in Trier. In 382, Emperor Gratian attempted to curtail the privileges of the Vestal Virgins in the city of Rome; however, he only failed to do so.

8 The question of whether Chinese Confucianism is a religion originated in the problems encountered by Western missionaries during their missionary journeys to China, when Matteo Ricci (利玛窦), in order to open up the missionary field, considered Chinese Confucianism to be a religion. In modern times, firstly, it was the duo of Kang Youwei (康有为) and Liang Qichao (梁启超) who characterized Confucianism. Both of them initially considered Confucianism to be a religion, but later LIANG Qichao changed his view that Confucianism was not a religion. Neo-Confucians, and some historians, have also discussed the religiosity of Confucianism, e.g., Koo Hungming (辜鸿铭), Xiong Shili (熊十力), Hu Shih, Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培), and Qian Mu (钱穆) believe that Confucianism in China is a religion. Although Chen Duxiu believed that Confucianism was a religion, it was a religion of "indoctrination" rather than "religion". Liu Shipei, Zhang Junmai (张君劢), Zhang Dainian (张岱年), and Chen Deng (陈登) believed in principle that Confucianism was not a religion. After 1978, Ren Jiyu, Zhang Dainian, Ji Xianlin (季羡林), Lai Yonghai (赖永海), He Guanghu (何光沪), Zhang Liwen (张立文), Li Shen (李申), and Zhang Rongming (张荣明) both continue to argue that Confucianism is a religion. Some scholars, nevertheless, say this is not true: Wang Dajian (王大建) points out that "Confucianism" is a kind of magic ("儒"实为一种术数); Guo Qiyong (郭齐勇) thinks that Confucianism is a spiritual form with both humanism and religious character (儒学是既有人文主义又具备宗教性品格的精神形态); Mou Zhongjian (牟钟鉴) and Zhang Jian (张践) raise that "Confucianism" is a "patriarchal traditional religion" ("儒学"是一种"宗法性传统宗教"); and Cai Shangsi (蔡尚思) hold that Confucianism is not religious, but it plays a religious role (儒学虽非宗教但起到了宗教的作用).

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Article

Wanwuyiti and *Finding God in All Things*: A Comparative Study between Neo-Confucian Self-Cultivation and Ignatian Spirituality

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Abstract: It seems that the early Jesuits misinterpreted the key Neo-Confucian terms *taiji*/*li* from an Aristotelian perspective in the seventeenth century, thereby leading to a dialogical failure in their initial encounter with Neo-Confucian tradition. What necessitates interreligious dialogue today is a pluralistic stance that deems all religious quests worthy in their own context. Therefore, this paper renews the dialogue between two spiritual traditions, long overdue, by reading two representative texts, side by side, from each tradition on self-cultivation: *Reflections on Things at Hand* (twelfth century) and *The Spiritual Exercises* (sixteenth century). The comparison showcases that the notion of "*wanwuyiti*", a concomitant of the Confucian *ren*, is tantamount to a religious imperative for human ethical engagements, and the Ignatian axiom "*Finding God in All Things*" energizes a spiritual self-transformation to forge an intimate bond with God and the world. While Neo-Confucian cultivation focuses on the removal of desires, seeking to maintain "equilibrium" and "centrality", the Ignatian exercises foreground commitment to "discernment" and "indifference". The Neo-Confucians address human and worldly affairs in a procedural manner, with ever-broadening horizons, to establish an orderly society. In contrast, the Ignatian self is directed toward an orderly life to serve, love, and bring ever more to God's Divine Majesty.

Keywords: *wanwuyiti*; *Finding God in All Things*; Neo-Confucian self-cultivation; Ignatian spirituality

1. Introduction

It was generally recognized by the European Jesuit missionaries in China in the seventeenth century that the teachings of Neo-Confucianism were materialistic at best, and the theory on the Supreme Ultimate (*li*) deviated from the notions of the Lord of Heaven in classical Confucianism (Ricci et al. 1985). Therefore, as Julia Ching puts it, "[Neo-Confucianism] displaced what was to them a more agreeable universe of earlier *religious beliefs* in the Lord-on-High and Heaven… it has little to offer in the line of *religious thinking*" (Ching 2000, p. 4).

Part of this response, it seems, was elicited from Matteo Ricci, the founder of the China mission, who "inherited" and mistakenly applied the Jesuit critique of Japanese Buddhism to both Chinese Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism (Li and Mei 2014, p. 14). On that ground, the spiritual and religious dimensions of Neo-Confucianism were explicitly denied and repudiated by generations of Jesuits.

Although the early Jesuits have been at the forefront of interreligious encounters since the inception of the order, demonstrating extraordinary openness toward non-European cultures, their global-scale salvation movement seems to generate much less, if not entirely impossible, interreligious learning from their Neo-Confucian partners.[1] To put it otherwise, the Jesuits firmly held the belief that what was true and holy was only to be found within the Christian fold.

The Western perspective of truth has undergone a radical shift since the Enlightenment and the rise of modernity, leading to the creation of new paradigms for understand-

ing religious truth. The Second Vatican Council, in the twentieth century, marked the beginning of an era of global interreligious dialogue. Since then, the dialogue has gained momentum between Christianity and other world religions (Cornille 2013, p. xii-4). More recently, Erin Cline has argued that Ignatian spirituality can contribute to an interreligious dialogical exchange to enrich the spiritual lives of members of other religions (Cline 2018, p. 21).

The Jesuit theologian Roger Haight has also emphasized that Ignatian spirituality may chart a new path to enlighten spiritual seekers of religious or non-religious traditions (Haight 2012, pp. 25–26). Both Cline and Haight have offered new insights into how Ignatian spirituality could benefit spiritual seekers through a Christian lens.[2] In this article, I argue that a comparative study between Neo-Confucian and Ignatian spirituality might shed fresh light on and cross-fertilize spiritual cultivation between Neo-Confucian and Ignatian traditions.

In so doing, an important question has to be addressed first: whether (Neo-)Confucianism is a religion and whether there is Neo-Confucian spirituality. As this is debated sometimes, a brief working definition is in order. My contention, following Frederick Streng, is that "religion" is "a means to ultimate transformation" that addresses existential questions (Streng 1985, p. 2). This definition is capacious enough to entertain a variety of religious phenomena. Likewise, "spirituality" is the fundamental organization of human lives and the core that provides coherence to human existence, incorporating transcendence, ultimacy, and individual life experience (Haight 2012, p. xix).

Based on these premises, this study builds a comparative enterprise centering on two representative texts that seek to cultivate and fulfill, ideally, the fullest human potential: *Reflections on Things at Hand* (近思录, hereafter Reflections, Zhu and Lü n.d.) assembled by Zhu Xi (1130–1200) and Lü Zuqian (1137–1181) between 1175 and 1178, and *The Spiritual Exercises* (*SE*) of Ignatius of Loyola published in 1548.[3] To be clear, *Reflections* and *SE* vary in terms of rhetoric, content, and style. While *Reflections* was composed to provide beginners with a primer with the essentials of the Neo-Confucian Cheng-Zhu school's method of self-cultivation (Tillman 1992, p. 215), *SE* has been an essential manual to Ignatian spirituality, highlighting an individual's election or choice of life in line with the will of God. Despite that, there are shared principles, attitudes, and mechanisms of self-cultivation that assist spiritual seekers to discipline and conquer the self, leading to a dialogue of spirituality[4] based on our common humanity and its finitude, as Haight has opined that "the humanity of Jesus is the key to his approachability, communicability, and universal relevance" (Haight 2012, p. 89).

2. The Neo-Confucianism Movement and *Reflections*

The Neo-Confucian movement was a revival of Confucianism in the Sung Dynasty (960–1279). The pre-Sung culture was characterized by the coexistence of the enormous popularity of Buddhism and the catastrophic moral degradation among the Chinese. The early Sung Confucians begged the question of whether Chinese Buddhism contributed to a moral (healthy) society (Mo 2003; Chen 2010). They felt an intense need to reassert traditional moral-cultural values and that "their response to social needs assumed the character of a religious mission".[5]

To revive the orthodox Confucian Dao, the Neo-Confucians learned metaphysics and meditation from their Buddhist enemies. They have shown their originality by rediscovering and reinterpreting *li* as a fundamental tenet underlying the entire realm of the universe.[6] In the dual *li–qi* scheme, the *li* signifies coherence, or "the valuable, intelligible way that things fit together" (Angle 2009, p. 32). By contrast, the *qi* (vital breath) is concrete. Things with visible outlines come into existence as the *qi* assembles and perish as it disperses. There is an ontological co-dependence of *li* and *qi* as well as an asymmetrical dependence in which *li* has explanatory priority (Angle and Tiwald 2017, p. 40).

Reflections comprises fourteen chapters and 622 sections. The first part, Chapter One, provides an "ontology of Dao". Chapters Two to Thirteen involve a comprehensive self-

cultivation scheme, encompassing subjects ranging from self-discipline to public service. The last chapter is a Confucian hagiography in which the authors exalted sages and worthies who took pains to live up to the principles of an ethical life.

2.1. Wanwuyiti[7] and Ren: A Moral Ontology

The crux of Neo-Confucian metaphysics lies in the notion that all things in existence constitute a single body, *wanwuyiti*, which can be traced to the classical period. Mencius (372-289 BCE) and Zhuangzi (late 4th century BC), for example, have both stated the idea of oneness between the self and all other things.[8] But it was among the early Sung Neo-Confucians that the idea of *wanwuyiti* rose to prominence.

Although Zhu Xi was the most famous Neo-Confucian, due credit should be given to the Cheng brothers, particularly the "truly creative figure" (Graham 1992, p. xxi), Cheng Yi (1033–1107), who reformulated and elaborated the concept of *li*. For the Cheng brothers, all affairs (*shi*) and matters (*wu*) form one body, and once a thing is produced, it possesses the *li* to complete it. Human beings can extend the principle to others, but because their endowment of *qi* may be dark and turbid, they are unable to do so.

To state otherwise, while all people partake in the same *li*, their *qi* is uneven. Indeed, the notion of *wanwuyiti* is predicated on the *li–qi* scheme. Simply put, *li* is the "principle" of all things, which is manifested more or less clearly or completely in particular things according to their endowment of *qi*, serving as that thing's true nature. It is this principle (*li*) that is also the intrinsically good nature of human beings, which is revealed as an aspect or condition of their minds. Each thing has its own *li*, but all of these *li* are really one Principle (*li*), the "Great Ultimate (*taiji*), which is thus both one and many" (Ziporyn 2008, p. 401).

In the same vein, Zhang Zai (1020–1077) argued that the universe is one, but its manifestations are many. An important extrapolation of *wanwuyiti* is the statement that proclaims *ren* to be the highest virtue among all.[9] *Ren*, as a core value in the ancient Confucian tradition, is the overarching quality that encompasses other virtues such as righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trustworthiness. Prior to the Cheng brothers, Zhang Zai sought to postulate *wanwuyiti* as an ontological basis of *ren* in his *Western Inscription*:

> "Heaven is my father, and Earth is my mother, and even such a small creature as I find an intimate place in their midst. Therefore, that which fills the universe I regard as my body, and that which directs the universe I consider as my nature. All people are my brothers and sisters, and all things are my companions…Respect the aged…Show deep love toward the orphaned and the weak". (Zhu et al. 1967, 2/89)

Using an analogy of familial relationships, this passage depicts Heaven and Earth as universal parents who love all, and all things are united in brotherly love. Likewise, the notion of *ren* is discussed exhaustively in the first chapter of *Reflections* and the term appears thirty-one times in the entire text. All of the early Sung masters have offered their interpretation of *ren*. Among them were the Cheng brothers, who expounded it more fully (Cheng et al. n.d.). Their exegesis consists of the role, nature, character, and function of *ren*. For instance, Cheng Hao elucidates the substance of *ren* by using the following metaphor:

> "Books on medicine describe paralysis of the four limbs as the absence of humanity [*ren*]…The man of humanity regards Heaven and Earth and all things as one body. To him, there is nothing that is not himself. Since he has recognized all things as himself, can there be any limit to his humanity? … To be able to judge others by what is in ourselves may be called the method of realizing humanity. The hope was that by looking at it this way we might get at the substance of humanity". (Zhu et al. 1967, 1/20)

The substance of *ren*, in Cheng Yi's words, arises from the idea of *wanwuyiti*—the interconnectedness of the self and every other being. To have *ren* is to sympathize, and the *ren* that is extended to the utmost is realized when the distinction between the self and the

other is effaced. When queried by disciples, Cheng Yi further identifies *ren* with "*universal impartiality*", suggesting that one "regard oneself and another as one, to be impartial and not selfish" (Zhu et al. 1967, 1/11). For Zhu Xi, *ren* refers to the original state; i.e., the principle is always present, but it is seen most clearly in a not-yet-manifested state—when things begin to grow and its purity has not been diffused (Zhu et al. 1967, 1/23). Cheng Yi draws important distinctions among *ren*, love, and commiseration:

> "The feeling of commiseration is what we call *ren*…later scholars have therefore considered love to be humanity. But love is a feeling, whereas humanity is nature. How can love be taken exclusively as humanity? … commiseration [is] the beginning of humanity… [but it] should not be called humanity itself…A man of humanity, of course, loves universally. But one may not therefore regard universal love as humanity". (Zhu et al. 1967, 1/20)

Therein, *ren* is, first of all, in unity with all things. It is also an altruistic principle in human nature (Graham 1992, p. 96), which is reflected in the passion expressed by the feelings of sympathy, commiseration, and love for others. *Ren* is manifested in the spirit of life and identified with pure origination.

Aside from Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi, Wang Yangming, the prominent Ming Neo-Confucian scholar, further explained the substance and function of *wanwuyiti*. In his commentary on the *Great Learning*, Wang asserted that there were great men who regard Heaven and Earth and all things as one body, the world was like one family, and the country was like one person (Chan 1969, p. 659). Underlying the way of the *Great Learning* is the substance of *wanwuyiti*—to manifest the bright virtue of mankind, while the function of *wanwuyiti* is manifested through love and care towards all people (Wang n.d.).

Wang argued that love toward one's father could be extended to that of all fathers. Love and compassion should not be confined to the Five Confucian Relationships: it can be extended to all sentient and non-sentient beings, even to shattered tiles and crushed stones—one cannot help a feeling of regret for them. The mind of the great man will be divided and narrow only if it is obscured by selfish desires. In this way, one cannot manifest his bright virtue to restore the original condition of forming one body with all things (Chan 1969, p. 660).

From Zhang Zai, to Cheng brothers, to Zhu Xi, and to Wang Yangming, the Sung and Ming Neo-Confucians arrived at a consensus on the significance of the notion of *wanwuyiti*—it does not so much construe a coherent universe as to provide a supernatural framework that made morality and ethics imperative for the human world. When the great man fulfills this Heaven-endowed nature, humanity (*ren*) will manifest in one's dealings with all things and affairs. It is precisely at this point that the Jesuits in the seventeenth century failed to recognize that the Neo-Confucian notion of *wanwuyiti* is not merely a metaphysical proposition. Rather, it signifies the interconnectedness of all things.

2.2. Internal Cultivation: The Right Attitude and Means

The principles and methods of internal cultivation can be derived mainly from Chapters Two to Five. This part engages the "investigation of things", "preserving the mind and nourishing nature", and self-discipline. Learners are advised to adopt the right attitude, practice, and methodology, and the problem of desire lies at the heart of internal cultivation.

One pair of correlates on the attitude and methodology of internal cultivation is expressed in the sayings "reverent composure (jing 敬) is to straighten the internal life" and "regarding tranquility (jing 静) as fundamental". Cheng Hao defines reverent composure as a method to govern oneself (Zhu et al. 1967, 2/61). A.C. Graham holds that there are two layers of meaning of jing 敬: to collect oneself, to be attentive to persons or things on one level, and to respect them and take them seriously on the other (Graham 1992, pp. 68–69). The Cheng brothers further expounded that if one assumes the attitude of jing 敬, they have the unity of mind to attain mental calmness and behave correctly. As Joe Adler indicates, Jing 敬 is the experiential ground or orientation for both mental activity and stillness (Adler 2014, p. 108).

To be able to maintain Jing 敬, one is advised to seek tranquility 静. Chapter Four places tranquility at the center of nurturing the mind and nature. In the first section, Zhou Dunyi stated that tranquility led to intelligence and penetration. Cheng Yi then elaborated, according to the fu (to return) hexagram from the *Book of Changes*, that the principle of nature inherent in human beings is very subtle. There must not be any selfish desire to disturb it, and it will proceed to operate smoothly. Being tranquil means being free from the impurities of selfishness and rashness. Next, when one's mind is tranquil and filled with the feeling of production and reproduction that characterizes Heaven and Earth, one will identify with *ren* and be overwhelmed with feelings of love (Zhu et al. 1967, 4/1).

A concrete practice to stay tranquil is quiet-sitting, a Neo-Confucian form of meditation. The Cheng brothers recommended this, and those who practice quiet-sitting were extolled as skilled in learning, as "when there is nothing to put into practice, go and do quiet-sitting… we can cultivate our original mind and become calm to some degree" (Zhu et al. 1967, 4/63). Despite the Cheng brothers' practice of quiet-sitting, Zhu Xi only mentioned it twice in the whole text, suggesting that it was a means to an end—learning and quiet-sitting are complementary daily practices that nurture the mind.[10]

Whether to maintain reverent composure or seek tranquility, the removal of desire plays a major role. Except for four chapters, all the rest discuss the problem of desire. In Chapter Five, "Self-discipline", we were informed that human beings were grappling with various desires: those of material objects, those of benefit, and those of human craving. Desire arises as a result of the effect of negative forces (the yin) and the endowment of turbid *qi*. We can moderately satisfy the desires necessary to sustain life, but we should deal with the selfish ones in three steps: restrain, reduce, and remove entirely. The last goal, as Zhu Xi implied, is attainable only by the sages.

Below is an interesting dialogue between Zhou Dunyi and his disciples. "Can one become a sage through learning?" Master Lien-hsi (Zhou Dunyi) said, "Yes". "Is there any essential way?" "Yes". "Please explain it to me". "The essential way is to concentrate on one thing. Concentrating on one thing means having no desire…" The implication is twofold: The importance of removing desire can never be underestimated since it is directly related to attaining sagehood; sagehood, despite its elusiveness, is accessible and seemingly straightforward.

To remove a particular type of desire, that of pleasure and comfort, there is a technique that could be described as "knowing when to stop". In Chapter Twelve, Section Three, Cheng Yi argues that most people have an inclination toward pleasure and comfort, and they are reluctant and slow to give it up. If one does not know the wisdom to stop at the right time, they may become accustomed to feelings of security and wealth, leading to pride, extravagance, and, finally, disorder in life. Therefore, when one is in a comfortable condition, one should stay alert and not indulge in it. Sages, by contrast, can stop at the right time (Zhu et al. 1967, 5/8). In the same chapter, Cheng Yi suggests that as soon as one is pleased, one should stop, precisely when one enjoys pleasure and comfort to the fullest. The key to internal cultivation seems to be adopting the right attitude and practical strategy, such as fostering the habit of "knowing when to stop".

2.3. External Cultivation: A Procedural Morality

When one has interiorized the inner values, ways of external self-cultivation offer concrete procedures to rectify one's behavior. Chapter Five, "Self-Discipline", deemed the following four steps necessary: improving oneself; correcting mistakes; mastering the self; and returning to propriety. When it comes to correcting mistakes, Zhou Dunyi advised that "the superior man (junzi) is active and vigilant and is unceasing in his sincerity". But he must "restrain his wrath, repress his desires…move toward good… and correct his mistakes before he can achieve his objective". What "mistakes" are referred to are less clarified. The following statements by Cheng Yi specify the nature of mistakes.

> "The mistakes of men follow the group to which they belong. A superior man is often mistaken for being liberal, while an inferior man is often mistaken for being

> stingy. The superior man is excessive in love, while the inferior men suffer from ruthlessness;" "… to reduce mistakes [is] to abide in the Mean and to reduce what is superficial and secondary…All the harm in the world comes from the superiority of the secondary… when… fundamental (material) needs are carried too far…harmful". (Zhu et al. 1967, 5/6)

Cheng Yi implies here that mistakes are contextual and quantitatively measured, depending on one's moral identity and social role. Unable to recognize what is fundamental and primary for human living, people made mistakes when they raised the secondary to the primary. Further, mistakes mainly involve those acts that are contrary to the requirements of social etiquette and rites.

Whether to correct the mistakes or rectify the mind, an important goal is to "return to propriety". Zhou Dunyi and the Cheng brothers all reiterate Yan Yuan's sayings about propriety (ritual) that one "did not look at what was contrary to propriety, did not listen to what was contrary to propriety, did not speak what was contrary to propriety, and did not make any movement that was contrary to propriety" (Zhu et al. 1967, 2/5). Cheng Yi holds that seeing, listening, speaking, and acting are functions of the body, manifesting what is within oneself. Controlling external behaviors will, in return, nourish internal ones (Zhu et al. 1967, 5/3). It seems that one's deportment and demeanor are a significant part of our cultivation that is conducive to a world of order.

Apart from "things at hand", external cultivation also involves the actual affairs of the world and the relationship between the self and other(s). The cultivation of affairs extends from the personal, the familial, the community, and the state to all under Heaven, increasingly decentralized from the self. Zhu Xi describes basic behavioral learning as "sprinkling and sweeping the floor, knowing how to greet people, and how to correctly answer their questions". For Neo-Confucians, the path toward sagehood began with lesser learning—daily conventions, etiquette, and norms.

The cultivation of filial piety, brotherly respect, loyalty, and proper behavior derived from ceremonies and music follows the lesser learning. These are oriented to shape a learner so he/she chooses the good and cultivates the self until, ultimately, the whole world is transformed and brought to perfection, the aim of greater learning. The individual must be cultivated at an orderly pace: rectifying one's mind and behavior, dealing with human relationships, taking part in public service, and pacifying the world. At last, society at large and the individual are harmonized in unity.

Throughout *Reflections*, there is a tension between sagehood[11] as a viable goal and the scarcity of sages. Although the masters explicitly state that one can be a sage through moral learning, they nevertheless warrant the lofty status to only a very few ancient kings and Confucius. Still, they suggest that even if one cannot make it to sagehood, there is a chance that one can be a "worthy", a "superior man (junzi)", an eminent scholar, and so forth. These are still commendable fruits of any self-cultivation effort.

2.4. Equilibrium and Harmony

One guiding principle overwhelmingly persistent in both internal and external self-cultivation is called "equilibrium" (*zhong*), which means "the middle" or "the mean". The term "*zhong*" generates two derivatives: "centrality and correctness" (*zhongzheng*) and "the middle way" (*zhongdao*). The Confucian classic *The Doctrine of Mean* describes "*zhong*" as the state before feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are aroused (not-yet-manifested)—absolute quietness, while the state when feelings are aroused and each attains due measure and degree is called "harmony".

However, Zhou Dunyi reinterpreted equilibrium as "the Mean is harmony. The Mean is the principle of regularity, the universally recognized law of morality, and is that which the sage is devoted to" (Zhu et al. 1967, 11/1). Here, what equilibrium (*zhong*) entails is changing from the stillness of the mind to the activity of the mind in a balanced state. Thus, Zhu Xi's adoption of Zhou Dunyi's reinterpretation created what Adler termed the "interpenetration of mental activity and stillness" (Adler 2014, p. 43). For Zhu Xi, equilibrium

has to be a middle ground in action/activism rather than the stillness/quietude that is down the slippery slope toward Buddhism and Daoism. The Neo-Confucian self-cultivation not only aims to transform the individual, but also to make an orderly society; that is, internal cultivation must be oriented toward external cultivation—action in the world, equilibrium being the nexus between the two.

Discussion on equilibrium abounds in every chapter of *Reflections*. First, equilibrium is equivalent to harmony, and all things and affairs embody this nature in their inception. To seek equilibrium is to seek the mean of human desires and feelings, but to maintain equilibrium is the most difficult. Chen Yi describes it this way:

> "The word is most difficult to understand. It must be understood silently and apprehended in one's mind. Take the living room. Its center is the zhong, but in the whole house, the zhong is not the center of the living room but is the central hall…Other cases can be inferred analogically". "One must achieve the Mean according to the circumstances. To balance means to weigh. What is to be the balance? It is righteousness and timeliness". (Zhu et al. 1967, 1/30; 3/64)

To arrive at the mean, one needs to see things in perspective. The mean is also subject to timeliness and righteousness. Cheng Hao argues that the mind has constant internal conflicts between the good and evil forces. If one keeps a strong will, the vital breath cannot disturb him/her: one can readily see the conflicts and find the mean. In addition, one's virtues should be compatible with his social role and status. Frequently, the masters warn that a morally inferior individual should not assume the duty of a superior, in that this will keep him/her out of balance (Zhu et al. 1967, 10/8).

This echoes what the *Doctrine of Mean* has proposed: "The noble person acts according to his position in life and does not desire what is beyond it…the noble person can find no situation in which he is not himself. When holding a superior position, he does not treat his inferiors with contempt. When holding a low position, he does not try to get in good with his superior" (Legge 1882, pp. 395–96). To conclude, strong will, persistent learning, and insight help one attain the mean. The mean is also to be achieved with a clear self-understanding of one's moral caliber.

The Neo-Confucian self-cultivation aims for "sageliness within and kingliness without", achieving wisdom and benevolence and positively influencing the construction of a moral society. Sung-era Neo-Confucian adherents either established academies of learning or dedicated themselves to serving the public.

3. Ignatius of Loyola and the *Spiritual Exercises*

While the construction of Neo-Confucian spiritual narrative began with a group of early-Sung scholars, the genesis of Ignatian narrative unfolded with the life story of Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), founder of the Society of Jesus[12] at a time when the Latin Church was challenged by new theologies and "jostled for orthodoxy amidst a growing array of churches and sects" (Hsia 2004, p. xii).

Contrary to the popular image of a staunch defender of the papacy and Church, recent developments in scholarship confirmed that Ignatius and his spirituality were shaped during a period when there was no precise boundary between orthodoxy and heresy and the concerns of the Counter-Reformation church did not profoundly influence him between his conversion and the founding of the Order (O'Reilly 2021, pp. 5. 37).

Born into a noble family in the Basque region of Spain, Ignatius was trained to be a courtier from an early age. He described himself as a man given to the vanities of the world before the age of twenty-six. However, a battle in 1521 changed everything. Ignatius was wounded and sent home to recuperate. During the long recovery, the only literature available was two religious works: a collection of the saints known as the *Golden Legend* and the *Life of Christ* (Haight 2012, pp. 3–13).

Reading religious books converted Ignatius, and he became a changed man who chose to do God's will and take the same path as the saints whose stories he had read so many times. Ignatius' conversion was a determinant in shaping his later life and the entire spir-

itual tradition named after him. His spiritual journey was further enriched by a great illumination at Manresa and other places. Thinking that his spiritual experience might be useful to others, he recollected and wrote *SE*. The booklet was published in 1548, after some twenty years of elaboration,[13] but it was used long before to nourish Christian spiritual life. Ignatius explicitly stated that the purpose of writing is to provide

> "every method of examination of conscience, of meditation, of contemplation…For as to go for a walk…are bodily exercises, so in like manner all methods of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate affections, and, after it has rid itself of them, to seek and to find the will of God in the ordering of one's life with a view to the salvation of one's souls". (Longridge and Acquaviva 1955, p. 4)

The text is a manual to guide exercises carried out by a retreatant and a director. Based on Ignatius's experience, it is oriented toward an election or choice of a state of life that helps mankind to live more fully in their embraced lifestyle. While all Jesuit novices have to take the exercises, others are also encouraged to practice it. In particular, Ignatius distinguished three types of retreatants: the not-fully qualified, those qualified yet hindered by obligations, and the fully qualified. Consequently, there are three ways of giving exercises, in part or whole (Longridge and Acquaviva 1955, p. 126).

The first part of *SE* consists of twenty "Annotations" and the "Principle and Foundation;" the second part is "Four Weeks of Exercises;" and the last part comprises suggestions on a variety of topics. In addition, under the generality of Claudio Acquaviva (1543–1615), an official directory of the Exercises was issued in 1599, offering directors advice on adding, withdrawing, or improving the practice. The main component of *SE*, a four-week retreat that spans thirty days, usually consists of "the purgative way", in which the retreatant meditates on his/her sins (week one); "the illuminative way", in which the retreatant contemplates the incarnation, the nativity, and the hidden life of Christ (week two); and "the unitive way", in which the retreatant associates himself/herself with Christ in his sufferings (week three) and his joys (week four) and finally establishes an intimate union with God through Christ. The last part offers methods of prayer, meditation, rules for spirit discernment, and so forth.

3.1. The Principle and Foundation of Spiritual Exercises

The first week begins with "Principle and Foundation", where Ignatius defines the central soteriological theme and the most important principle in Christian spiritual formation. W. H. Longridge commented that all of the subsequent teachings of the *Exercises* follow this (Longridge and Acquaviva 1955, p. 19). Like the Neo-Confucian first principle of *li*, the principle is self-evident, requiring no proof.

Though the articulation of the principle is pithy, the meaning is profound: human beings were created to praise and serve God to save their souls. Other things were created to help him/her achieve this goal. One may seek external aid only if other things facilitate serving God. Thereupon, we should be indifferent to all created things in such a way that we do not "wish for health rather than sickness, for wealth rather than poverty, for honor rather than dishonor, for a long life rather than a short one… desiring and choosing only that which leads us more directly to the end for which we were created" (Longridge and Acquaviva 1955, p. 26).

The "Principle and Foundation" offers four propositions: the end for which all humans are created; the end of creatures and things in relation to human beings; the human usage of creatures and things; and the necessity of indifference (Longridge and Acquaviva 1955, p. 27). First, the end of all people is to praise and bring glory to God. This is because, as George Ganss argued, Ignatius's entire worldview was based on "God's plan of creating free human beings for his glory and their beatitude" (Ganss 1992, p. 201). Longridge interprets "to praise" not only as in words, but also in living or acting for the glory of God. Salvation comes as a secondary aim, denoting not merely the escape from damnation, but the highest moral perfection (Longridge and Acquaviva 1955, p. 205). Again, the

salvation of one's soul is associated with the service of God. Ignatius adds that the means to human perfection is through the ordering of one's life, which is often perturbed by a human being's inordinate affections.

The "creature and other things" denotes everything between one's ego and God, such as material possessions, time, friends, one's activity, abilities, and even many natural gifts that one is born with (Rahner and Baker 2014, p. 19). One should separate himself/herself from these "other things" to free the ego. Only through mastery over other things can one remove the inordinate affections. Taken at face value, the proposition about indifference is confounding: should one not wish for health, wealth, honor, and a long life? Admittedly, Ignatius claims that if these other things hinder us from realizing our end, we should be indifferent to them, which entails the conquering of the self to act with freedom according to reason and the will of God (Longridge and Acquaviva 1955, p. 29). What indifference implies is akin to detachment from external desires or neutrality toward objects of thought that would normally produce emotional reactions (Newman 1996, p. 58).

Longridge suggests that the retreatant rids themselves of desires by intentionally acting diametrically against them so as to establish an equilibrium of affections. Further, apart from the indifference toward desire or aversion to created things, there should be a desire for what God wills (Longridge and Acquaviva 1955, p. 30). According to Hugo Rahner, the foundation of Ignatian indifference lies in the belief that only God is worthy of love, while all other creatures fall into the eclipse of God (Rahner 1968, p. 24). The struggle against worldly desire, therefore, can be a complex journey that navigates through indifference, resistance, and a strong yearning for divine guidance.

3.2. The Discernment of Spirits

The discernment of the spirits is an important part of *SE*. There are two sets of rules (*SE*, 314–336) for weeks one and two, respectively, centered on "a study of regimens for transforming emotions" (Newman 1996, p. 52). Longridge argued that discernment helps examine the soul-moving spirits and the movement itself to distinguish between what is desired and what is not.

There are two types of movement from without: the one from God—illuminations, inspirations, and divine motions and the one from the devil—evil thoughts, desires, scruples, and false reasonings. The two ways of interior perception are also called "consolation" and "desolation". Consolation is described as follows:

> "When an interior movement is aroused in the soul, it is inflamed with the love of its Creator and Lord. As a result, it can love no created thing on the face of the earth for its own sake, but only in the Creator of them all…I call consolation every increase of hope, faith, and charity, and all interior joy which calls and attracts the soul to heavenly things, and its salvation, rendering it quiet and at peace in its Creator and Lord". (*SE*, 316)

Consolation was explained as a supernaturally granted spiritual affection that readily generated acts of virtue, followed by positive affections that overshadowed works of the flesh (Longridge and Acquaviva 1955, p. 325). The manifestation of consolation varied from peace, and interior quiet to spiritual joy and so forth. Desolation, on the other hand, is depicted as "darkness and confusion of soul, attraction towards based and earthly objects, disquietude caused by various agitations and temptations" (Longridge and Acquaviva 1955, p. 186). When in desolation, negative emotions such as sadness, depression, and aridity arise. One will then experience disquiet in the mind and crave earthly things.

In week one, most rules of discernment focus on the problem of desolation. Ignatius insists that one stay firm in the pre-desolation resolution and exercise greater self-discipline to deal with it, e.g., insist more on prayer, self-examination, and the practice of penance. The retreatant is generally advised to follow the example of Jesus Christ.

Three factors contribute to desolation: human sloth and negligence; the trial from God; and the understanding that only God can provide spiritual consolation (*SE*, 322). Nevertheless, with grace from God, one is capable of resisting enemies that tempt him/her

to desolation. Three interesting analogies were used to characterize the enemies: a woman, a false lover, and a commander, meaning that the enemies appear strong but are weak; they are deceitful and hidden; and they attack through human weakness.

In week two and afterward, the focus shifts to the distinction between good and false consolation. In this way, the rules of discernment are fuller (Longridge and Acquaviva 1955, p. 190). For example, in rules three and four, it is suggested that what appears good may derive from the deceit of evil. To distinguish the workings of the devil, there is a twofold criterion: the end that the thought tends to and the state of the soul that it causes (Longridge and Acquaviva 1955, p. 192).

John Newman has offered a useful perspective on the rules of discernment. The discernment of spirit draws emotions into a framework of concentrated attention and allows for their alteration through cognitive examination. Factual or evaluative beliefs and evaluations essentially constitute emotions, making them cognitive in nature. Consequently, the distinction between emotions is analogous to that between their respective cognitive contents. When emotions are mistaken or disordered, one can alter their cognitive contents (e.g., evaluative beliefs) to conform to their proper objects (Newman 1996, pp. 5–12). The proper object is undoubtedly the service and praise of God, and the love of God.

3.3. The Use of Imagination in Interior Cultivation

Whether through the rules of discernment or the choice of a state of life, *SE* seeks to provide a sense of the immediate presence of God and union with God, mediated through an intimate companionship with Jesus of Nazareth. Ignatius inherited a medieval tradition where there used to be a sense of a wholly integrated universe, society, and personal life. An individual's intimacy with God and a sense of belonging are taken for granted. Such a sense of intimacy, regrettably, has to be cultivated for a retreatant today (Hellwig 2008, pp. 50–58).

There are two primary means of cultivation in the Christian tradition: via positiva or via negativa—either with the aid of senses, imagination, and intellect or without them. Ignatius opts for the former, positive theology, and therein the retreatant is to cultivate visual and sensory imagination in prayers, to contemplate gospel scenes, entering into them in imagination, to play a role, to come to a relationship of affection with Jesus, his family, etc. (Hellwig 2008, pp. 50–58).

From the beginning of the first exercise, the retreatant is required to use the three powers of the soul in meditation: memory, understanding, and will. To memory, Ignatius ascribes a calling to the mind of facts in gospel stories. Understanding is assigned to reason, and deductions are made tending toward a practical end. Will involves focusing on the object of meditation and directing the movement of the affections. These three powers are not separated from each other. Rather, they are integrated into one imaginative process (Longridge and Acquaviva 1955, p. 209). An Ignatian meditation is based on a regular structure: a preparatory prayer, the preludes, the principle points, and an ending colloquy. Take the meditation of hell (week one, the fifth exercise) as an example. Ignatius wrote:

> "The first prelude is a composition of place, which is here to see with the eyes of the imagination the length, breadth, and depth of hell. The second is to ask for that which I desire. It will be here to ask for an interior sense of the pain…The first point will be to see with the eyes of the imagination those great fires, and the souls as it were in bodies of fire. The second is to hear with the ears the wailings, the groans, the cries, the blasphemies against Christ our Lord, and all His saints. The third is to smell with the sense of smell the smoke, the brimstone, the filth, and the corruption. The fourth is to taste with the sense of taste bitter things, such as tears, sadness, and the worm of conscience. The fifth is to feel with the sense of touch how those fires touch and burn the souls". (*SE* 65–70)

As the retreatant visualizes and imagines, he "sees" hell through seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling, and touching, which Ignatius described as the "application of senses". With photographic memories, the hellish torment seemed to be alive and immanent in the

here and now, for Ignatius maintains that an interior sense of feeling the pains will "help one not to fall into sin". Antonio De Nicolas delineates this as both "memory" and "powers of imagining", a re-enactment of "the symbolic narratives of the past to feel the effects of one's imagined present participation in the lives and events…of Christ and his disciples" (De Nicolas 1986, p. x).

The imaginative technologies derive from an oral tradition from Ignatius's time. Though the will of God and the Trinitarian experience characterize Christianity, it has already happened and can only be recovered by imagination, memory, and love. The union between God and the soul can be opened only when one shifts from self-centeredness to attachment to the will of God (De Nicolas 1986, pp. 35–36).

As De Nicolas makes clear, Ignatius's memory-making imagination is a combined effort of imagining and the removal of one's familiar subjective or objective images. The retreatant was forced to create a pure image in which God's signs would appear. By reading and writing sensation onto images, the retreatant articulates a language of its own to bring about a transformation in the human body—to make decisions, again, in line with the will of God (De Nicolas 1986, pp. 42–43).

3.4. Finding God in All Things

The idea of "*Finding God in All Things (FGAL)*" can be found in "Contemplation to Attain Love" at the end of *SE*, depicting the ultimate relationship between a human being and God. Ignatius proposes two things first: love will manifest itself in deeds rather than words; love is interchangeable between the beloved and the lover. The entire experience of *SE* encapsulates the connection between a human being and God, and the retreatant is expected to embody this relationship in their everyday existence.

In the preludes, the retreatant is asked to "see" God and "ask for" an interior knowledge of God's generous endowment so he/she could love and serve in return. "The first point is to call to mind the benefits received from creation, redemption, and particular gifts… on my part… to offer and give to His Divine Majesty…all my possessions…Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will, all I have and possess. Thou hast given all this to me; to Thee, O Lord, I restore it" (*SE*, 234).

The retreatant is also expected to contemplate the immanence of God in all things, God's works in all things for the good of man, and the transcendence of God. Next, the retreatant offers all that he/she possesses to God and ends up loving and praising God in the purest and perfect love (Longridge and Acquaviva 1955, pp. 155–56). Ignatius wrote:

> "The second point is to consider how God dwells in the creatures: in the elements, giving them being; in the plants, giving them growth; in the animals, giving them sensation; in men, giving them understanding…giving me being, life, sensation…The third is to consider how God works and labors on my behalf in all created things on the face of the earth". (*SE*, 235)

In the last exercise, the exercitant surrenders himself/herself completely to God, realizing the give-and-take between humanity and God. It presents a way of finding God in all created things, including human beings themselves and all things in God. However, what are the deeds that Ignatius implies in this contemplation? Obviously, it is the apostolic service driven by Ignatius' mystical illuminations and God-given impulses of love. He was inspired by the idea of serving God, promoting God's glory, learning God's will, and carrying it out—nothing less than to reform the entire world. Ignatius was a great realist, driven to seek and find God not in ideals, but in all things, including the political and social realms (Egan 1987, pp. 119–20).

In its way, Ignatius' concern for Christian spiritual formation partially demonstrates the depth of response made by the Society of Jesus to the social–cultural needs of the time: the reform and re-evangelization of society and the propagation of Catholic faith on a global scale (Lewis 1996, pp. 112–27). The contribution of spiritual formation through *SE* to religious reform cannot be overlooked, because the early Jesuits tended to understand Reformation as primarily a pastoral problem related to the spirituality of the individuals,

to help the souls, and to the acceptance of the lived reality of God's action (O'Malley 1993, pp. 16–18).

Ignatius and his early companions showcase what it means to *Find God in All Things* not only in the interior, but also in the exterior. On the one hand, one could witness the multiple roles Ignatius played after his conversion as a pilgrim, student, religious leader, writer, saint, and mystic. On the other hand, aside from *SE*, the early Jesuits were involved in two programs of ministries: the ministry of Formula, including the word, sacrament, and works, and the establishment of schools (O'Malley 1993, pp. 85–90). They were not so much seeking interior discipline as finding the will of God and serving God as educators, missionaries, ministers, scientists, and so forth in their varied means of service to the entire world.

4. Observations and Discussions

Reading these two spiritual texts side by side, there are apparent resonances between the central theme of *wanwuyiti* and *Finding God in All Things*. First, both offer a supernatural framework that directs the self vis à vis the other and inspires actions rooted in the nature of ultimate reality—*ren* and love, and that the Neo-Confucian and Ignatian spiritual formation is closely associated with social and cultural transformations.

Wanwuyiti entails, ultimately, the position that there is no distinction between the self and every other being (or non-being) in such a way that *ren* evinces itself spontaneously. Just as the production and reproduction (生生) of Heaven and Earth are everlasting, so is the unity of *ren* with all things. This enduring belief in unity and harmony is translated into an individual moral scheme oriented toward *ren* and a return to the heavenly endowed human nature. Self-cultivation is not merely the interiorization of moral standards. Rather, the Neo-Confucians aspire to change society by transmitting Confucian Dao and elucidating its doctrines. On the communal level, the early Sung masters shared similar aspirations and life stories, e.g., committed to learning; most devoted their adult lives to scholarship, writing, and public service. They truly sought to reshape moral beings and promote a well-ordered society where each one fulfills his/her proper role.

In *SE*, after reliving the Jesus story, the retreatant has been recharged with a new spirituality for daily life: action beyond affective feelings of love (Haight 2012, p. 280). First, in realizing that God is in all things, one is invited to live and share a life compatible with that presence and collaborate with God's transforming intention for all, leading to a radical commitment to the world—nothing and no one should be excluded. All things become God's property, including Church and pastoral work, politics, diplomacy, and so forth (Rahner 1968, p. 22). Three components sum up the essentials of the Jesuit ministries: their ministries of the Formula, Exercises, and education programs (O'Malley 1993, p. 85). Among them, the early Jesuit ministry involved that of the Word, the sacrament, and works of mercy. Part of their identity was disclosed through the schools in which students were channeled, among others, toward the development of character, preparing for a life of service, and the change of culture at large (O'Malley 1993, p. 90).

Second, personal transformation comes from searching within oneself—"the turn to the depths" (Tetlow 1992, p. 9), either through seeking the true human nature in *li* or seeking the union between human beings and God. Both interior and exterior cultivation are integral parts of the whole person—*ren* and love have to be manifested through life-affirming practice in the world of mankind and affairs. Furthermore, we cannot underestimate the importance of education for the common good and the reinvigoration of a tradition in spiritual cultivation. Nevertheless, the Neo-Confucian self-cultivation is oriented toward returning to the origin of human nature in a relational scheme of *wanwuyiti*, while the Ignatian tradition envisions contemplation in action—evangelizing an ever-expanding world for the *Magis*.

Third, the focus of interior cultivation consists of dealing with the problem of desire. For the Neo-Confucians, desire is associated with selfish interest, that which is not real and universal in the world's true interest. By constantly nurturing and rectifying the mind

through learning, one will transform the mind and arrive at an equilibrium to make an impartial judgment. Ideally, one arrives at a state that is void of selfishness and filled with the *li* of Heaven and goodness (Taylor 1978, p. 87). The goal of *SE* is to discern the disordered affections that prevent one from acting with freedom and in conformity with the right reason and the will of God. The solution is to maintain indifference to created things that can be desired only insofar as they serve the end of humanity. The retreatant is urged to choose poverty and humiliation with Christ and to desire to follow Him. To sum up, whatever is against the *li* of Heaven or the will of God is to be abandoned, and one should arrive at a state of equilibrium in desiring worldly things.

Aside from the thematic overlap between the two spiritual traditions, there are complementary aspects that invite further reflection and interreligious learning. The religious imagination figuring prominently in *SE* inspires us to read the last chapter of *Reflections* anew, where Zhu Xi vividly recounted stories of sages and worthies, apparently believing that these would help educate the world. Consider the paradigmatic examples of Cheng Hao and Zhang Zai, whose biographical narratives are particularly impressive; the two were depicted as exceptionally virtuous in their pursuit of learning, their handling of human relationships, and their performance of various social roles. One may be induced to partake in their life stories and forge an intimate bond with them by following the Ignatian way of memory-making imagination in contemplation.[14] Even the frequent appearance of Confucius and Zhu Xi in dreams has kept him in good faith to follow the Way, written by the Neo-Confucian Wu Yubi in his journal (Wu 2013).

Special attention can also be riveted to the sensory details that may have been disregarded previously. For example, one may see "objects" while reading the following passage: "When most people thought that a matter was extremely difficult, the Master (Cheng Yi) did it naturally as the irresistible flow of water. His conscientiousness and sincerity penetrated metal and stone, and his filial piety and brotherly respect influenced spiritual beings. As one looked at his countenance, one found that in dealing with people, he was as warm as the spring sun. As one listened to his words, one found that as they entered one's ear, they were as enriching as timely rain".

Sagehood may still be elusive, but constant imagining in the Ignatian fashion could direct us straight toward the path, bringing us closer to achieving the desideratum. Stephen Angle made similar suggestions, positing that direct modeling on sages may not be applicable, but we may learn from worthies—even our teachers and local notables (Angle 2009, p. 17). After reading *SE*, those narratives and sensory details scattered everywhere in *Reflections* were illuminated, as if by a new light, and so has our understanding of how to be a sage—through imaging embodied spirituality.

On the other hand, given that spiritual exercise is usually accomplished in a concentrated period, the Neo-Confucian attention to daily practice might be a natural complement to its Ignatian counterpart, i.e., attending closely to daily practices as reflected in our words, feelings, intentions, etiquette, and concrete behaviors, to foster what P.J. Ivanhoe specified as "the awareness, attentiveness, and care in and of every day" (Ivanhoe 2013, p. 72). Further, Neo-Confucian procedural morality, including its prescriptions and strategies that start with the daily renewal of things at hand to improve ourselves in our family, community, society, and, finally, the greater world, may be a pragmatic way toward the transformation of the self.

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Notes

1 As Francis X. Clooney pointed out, "Despite their cultural creativity and determination to be open where possible, in the end, whatever they identify as 'pagan', they reject". Quoted from (Cline 2018, pp. 21–22).

2 Cline noted that most Christian theologians define spirituality in monotheistic terms. The Christian inclusivists and exclusivists are open to the possibility of sharing Exercises either because they consider conversion to Christianity necessary for salvation or not. For Haight, Exercises could be adapted for members of non-religious traditions. None of them discuss whether there should be mutual understanding and learning from the spiritual resources of other religious traditions.

3 This text brings together the views of five prominent Sung Confucian scholars. Zhu Xi was recognized as the main contributor. For *Reflections*, I used Wing-Tsit Chan's English translation. Chan adopted the text of Chu Tzu i-shu, which is the printed edition of the Li family's Pao-kao Hall. See (Zhu et al. 1967). See also (Zhu et al. 2011). For *SE*, I used the translation and commentary of W.H. Longridge, George E. Ganss, and Joseph A. Tetlow.

4 Paul Knitter distinguished four types of interreligious dialogue: the dialogue of theology, spirituality, action, and life. See (Cornille 2013, p. 134).

5 On the religious nature of Neo-Confucian pursuit of sagehood, see (De Bary 1975, p. 7); see also (Taylor 1978, pp. 101–11).

6 The term *li* （理） is exceptionally important, but ambiguous. It has been translated as "form", "principle", "order", "reason", "Logos", and "pattern". The appearance of "*li*" in early Confucian texts is sparse. It only became the central metaphysical category in Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi. See (Ziporyn 2008, pp. 401–22); see also (Zhang 1963, p. 44).

7 The term *wanwuyiti* （万物一体） literally means "ten thousand things forming one body", which has been translated in various ways, e.g., "Ten Thousand Things-One Body", "Forming One Body with the Universe", "Unity of All Things", "Unifying Interconnectedness", "Theory of One Body", and so forth.

8 See (Meng and Zhao n.d., vol. 13). See also Zhuang, Zi. "Discussion on Making All Things Equal', in (Watson 2013). The Complete Works of Zhuangzi, p. 13.

9 *Ren* is translated as "humanity", "benevolence", "perfect virtue", "goodness", "human-heartedness", "love", "altruism", and so forth. Wing-tsit Chan argues that none of them exhaust their meaning. "*Ren*" is used in Confucian texts in two different senses, both as a specific virtue and as a broader term signifying the attainment of all the interrelated virtues.

10 There were two types of quiet-sitting: one a general state of quiet reflection, and the other a contemplation aimed at the ground of one's nature. See (Taylor 1978, pp. 77–78).

11 The idea of sagehood has evolved since the classical period, it has been linked with skill, creativity, political authority, perception, and moral virtue. See (Angle 2009, pp. 14–17).

12 Undoubtedly, Ignatius's inspiration for *SE* came from his inherited tradition. The view of Christ as the Savior dominated the concept of imitating Christ from the early Church to the Middle Ages. *The Imitation of Christ* summarized and passed on to future generations much of the late medieval spiritual teachings on which Ignatius drew heavily. See (Constable 1995, pp. 147, 241).

13 The major literary sources of *SE* detected are the *Life of Christ* of Ludolph the Carthusian (1300–1378), the *Golden Legend* of Jacob of Voragine (1230–1298), the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471), a confessional manual, and a *Book of Hours*. See (O'Reilly 2021, p. 185).

14 In Ming scholar Wu Yubi's spiritual journal, he asserted repeatedly that dreaming of Confucius and Zhu Xi consolidated his faith to follow the Way for life. Much more can be derived from employing the Ignatian technique of imagining in meditation.

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Article

Approaching Saint Bernard's Sermons on the "Song of Songs" through the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing*): A Confluence of Medieval Theology and Chinese Culture

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Abstract: This paper aims to decode medieval theology from the vantage point of ancient Chinese poetry, employing a cross-textual methodology that encourages a fusion of horizons. It highlights Saint Bernard's profound and influential theological exegesis of the "Song of Songs", particularly his comparison of the divine–human relationship to the conjugal bond. The present study posits that readers from Chinese culture can gain access to Saint Bernard's mystical theology through the sentiment of love, as portrayed in the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing*). Initially addressing love as a core human sentiment, this study progresses by juxtaposing the representations of love in the *Book of Odes* with those in the "Song of Songs". This comparative analysis culminates in an exploration of Saint Bernard's theological perspectives, illuminated through these analogous depictions of love. The results affirm that engaging with Saint Bernard's discourse on love via the *Book of Odes* is not only feasible but also instrumental in dispelling widespread misconceptions.

Keywords: medieval mystical theology; *Book of Odes* (*Shijing*); "Song of Songs"; Saint Bernard of Clairvaux

1. Introduction

Love, an enduring and universal theme, has captivated philosophers, theologians, writers, poets, and artists across all epochs, who have endeavored to articulate their experiences and interpretations of it. Descartes, widely recognized for his assertion "Cogito, ergo sum", probes the foundation of self-existence by questioning the certainty of external realities versus the indubitable presence of a doubting self. Jean-Luc Marion, a contemporary French philosopher, critiques Descartes' emphasis on thought, suggesting that he overlooks the primordial role of "love". Marion argues that the inability to envisage being loved constitutes a profound erosion of selfhood, reducing it to a mere mechanistic entity devoid of the relational capacity observed even among animals. He posits that openness to love precedes rational cognition, asserting that existence is sustained not merely through rational justification but also through the intrinsic value of love (Marion 2007, p. 26). This perspective reframes the ego not as an autonomous thinker but as an inherently relational one grounded in the act of love.

In contemporary society, the absence of love as a foundational principle risks reducing significant achievements to mere exercises in instrumental rationality. For instance, in activities such as marriage, child-rearing, participation in community or club engagements, caregiving to parents, visits to hospitals and nursing homes, and even participation in religious practices, if these activities are not underpinned by love, they may devolve into choices made purely out of instrumental rationality. Attempts to discourse on love frequently encounter interpretative ambiguity. Efforts to assign it a precise, rigorous definition are often futile due to the vast diversity in its objects and expressions, ranging from divine love and familial affection to friendship, spousal devotion, sexual partnership, altruism towards strangers, and fervor for ideals or concepts. Concepts such as duty,

rights, pleasure, benefits, and expectations further obscure our direct articulation of love. This complexity has spawned diverse terminologies to capture the nuances of related yet distinct emotional experiences. Reexamining and reflecting upon historical articulations and contemplations of love appears meaningful for contemporary society.

While love inherently constitutes a relational dynamic with another, its orientation frequently extends towards a transcendental realm, embodying a yearning that remains perpetually unfulfilled. Emmanuel Levinas elucidates this notion by suggesting the presence of luminosity "beyond the face, from what is not yet, from a future never future enough, more distant than the possible" (Levinas 1990, p. 285). A historical examination of the notion of love, particularly its transcendental attributes, reveals a rich tapestry of discourse among ancient scholars. This reflective inquiry sets the stage for a deeper exploration of the ancient conceptions of love, with an emphasis on the significant impact of the biblical narrative, especially as articulated through the "Song of Songs". This scriptural composition, devoted to the exploration of love between a man and a woman, beckons a wider spectrum of interpretations and understandings transcending its explicit narrative. The "Song of Songs" is unique in the biblical canon for centering its thematic essence on the romantic love between a man and a woman. The exegetical contributions of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux to this dialogue are notably profound. His series of interpretations not only garnered widespread recognition but also constituted some of the most celebrated and influential analyses during the Middle Ages, laying foundational principles for mystical theology.

The legacy of Saint Bernard's exegetical contributions to the "Song of Songs" can be evaluated from two critical dimensions. Initially, the broad influence exerted by the 13th-century seminal work, *Golden Legend*, served as a conduit for disseminating Saint Bernard's insights, notably impacting the Dominican order throughout the 14th century and subsequently permeating medieval Scholastic philosophy (Boureau 1993, pp. 85–86). Saint Thomas Aquinas, a pivotal theologian of the Middle Ages, was also influenced by Saint Bernard's exegesis of the "Song of Songs" (Bonino 2019, pp. 20–21). The interpretative endeavors of Saint Bernard concerning the "Song of Songs" had an indirect but significant influence on the philosophical frameworks of John Duns Scotus (Boulnois 1999, p. 166). Moreover, within the Cistercian order, Saint Bernard's profound influence ensured that his unfinished commentary on the "Song of Songs" found successors in Guillaume de Saint-Thierry and John de Forde, who endeavored to complete his interpretative vision. The implications of their contributions are profound, marking an indelible impact on the broader currents of Western Monasticism. This dual-faceted legacy highlights the enduring scholarly and spiritual resonance of Saint Bernard's work in the "Song of Songs" across diverse theological and philosophical landscapes.

When Chinese readers encounter Saint Bernard's *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, how is understanding possible amidst the collision of two distinct cultures? This question pertains to Gadamer's discussion on the "fusion of horizons".

> This is not to open the door to arbitrariness in interpretation but to reveal what always takes place. Understanding the word of tradition always requires that the reconstructed question be set within the openness of its questionableness—i.e., that it merges with the question that tradition is for us. If the "historical" question emerges by itself, this means that it no longer arises as a question. It results from the cessation of understanding—a detour in which we get stuck. Part of real understanding, however, is that we regain the concepts of a historical past in such a way that they also include our own comprehension of them. Above I called this "the fusion of horizons". (Gadamer 2004, p. 367)

Gadamer posits that interpreters and texts are shaped by 'effective history', framing understanding within a hermeneutic horizon. Prejudices from this history are foundational to interpretation, which can evolve through a 'fusion' with the studied work (Van Zoeren 1991, p. 5). Consequently, it is imperative to scrutinize the intrinsic textual significance of both the "Song of Songs" and *Shijing* prior to delving into the effectiveness of the fusion of horizons.

In *the Analects* of Confucius, *Ren* emerges as a multifaceted concept, appearing 109 times in *the Analects*, and is closely associated with love. Yet, romantic expressions are scarcely found in the Confucian texts, with the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing*, henceforth) standing as a notable exception. Both *Shijing* and the "Song of Songs" highlight the presence of the love poem at the inception of both Chinese and Hebrew civilizations, respectively. While comparisons between Confucian and Western metaphysical thoughts are frequent, the juxtaposition of the "Song of Songs" with *Shijing* is less common. This suggests that Confucianism alone cannot encapsulate Chinese culture entirely, which is a view critiqued by Marcel Granet, a French sinologist who argues against James Legge's view that Confucianism fully represents Chinese civilization (Granet 1982, p. 16). Noteworthy comparative work on these texts explores their civilizational origins and literary expressions (Gálik 1997). Both texts reveal intricate nuances and robust declarations of love, showcasing similarities in how love is experienced and expressed. The present study focuses on the authentic human sentiment of love delineated within these works, echoing Granet's call for a deeper analysis that transcends literary and symbolic interpretations to unveil the original essence of the poems in *Shijing* (Granet 1982, p. 17).

We observe that both the "Song of Songs" and *Shijing* are accompanied by a rich tradition of commentary. In the Confucian school of China, the earliest interpretation of *Shijing* was naturally conducted by the founder of the Confucian school, Confucius himself. According to the records of his students' observations and interactions with him, Confucius primarily focused on employing *Shijing* to elaborate on his views regarding ritual norms (Van Zoeren 1991, p. 43). A century or two after Confucius' death, Confucian teachers transformed *Shijing* into texts imbued with moral significance (Van Zoeren 1991, p. 52). They often extracted verses from their original context within *Shijing* and endowed them with new meanings. In the fourth century BC, Mencius further interpreted *Shijing* based on Confucius' life and teachings. He approached the book from a distinctly Confucian standpoint, from which he developed the Confucian philosophy of life and political ideals. Xunzi, a Confucian writer and philosopher who lived during the Warring States Era in China, also frequently cited *Shijing* to substantiate his ethical doctrines, though his aim was to introduce his legalistic ideas (Van Zoeren 1991, p. 76).

During the Han Dynasty, with the then emperor's support, Confucianism saw greater development, and interpretations of *Shijing* became increasingly rich. "New Text Confucianism was exemplified by the three schools represented by chairs in the Imperial Academy of the mid-second century. Each of these Three Schools (*Sanjia*), as they came to be known later, had its own text of the *Odes* and its own characteristic tradition of exegesis" (Van Zoeren 1991, p. 97). Thinkers during the Jin dynasty (266–420) and Northern and Southern dynasties (386–589) went further in imbuing *Shijing* with moral and educational meanings, mapping the positions of different poems within *Shijing* to the spatial structure of the world and even the universe—a perspective not verified by modern astronomy.

Kong Yingda (574–648), a distinguished Confucian scholar during the Tang Dynasty, offered an interpretive analysis of "The Ospreys Cry" *(Kwan-Ts'ü)* that diverged significantly from its original intent, opting instead for a political exegesis. He construed the poem as a representation of the conjugal dynamics between an emperor and his consort, extending this metaphor to encompass the rulers across various dynasties. Kong Yingda elucidated the intricate linkage between the emperor's emotional state and the broader realms of national tranquility and economic progression, thereby imbuing the text with a profound political dimension (Saussy 1993, p. 76).

Ouyang Xiu (1007–1072) of the Song Dynasty reflected on the traditions of *Shijing* commentary of the Han, Jin, Northern, and Southern Dynasties, opposing the overly allegorical interpretations of the Han Dynasty thinkers and advocating for a more direct reading of *Shijing* (Van Zoeren 1991, p. 167). He was arguably the first thinker since the Han and Tang Dynasties to candidly acknowledge *Shijing* as a collection of love poetry. For instance, his interpretation of "Of Fair Girls" (*Tsing nü*) appears sincere and straightforward:

> The medieval interpretation as developed by Zheng Xuan and the Correct Significance grew out of that of the Mao Commentary and the Preface. The Preface states that the Ode was directed against Duke Xuan of Wei (r. 717-699 BCE), who, with his wife, was "guilty of licentious conduct". On this reading, the Ode described a beautiful and virtuous young woman, an appropriate mate and implicit reproach for the duke. The "corner of the Wall" in the first stanza was emblematic of the young woman's unassailable virtue (because the wall was high), and the red tube of the second was a writing brush with which the "female historians" (nüshi) of the Zhou court recorded the rules and activities of the harem. By so rebuking the duke and his consort, the poet demonstrated an appropriate emotional response to their conduct, and the Ode that inscribed that response could serve as an instrument of moral education. Ouyang dispensed with most of what he termed the "far-fetched" (yu) features of the medieval interpretation. For Ouyang, the Ode concerned a meeting between two lovers; the "red tube" of the second stanza was a love token, and the corner of the wall a trysting spot. Although he was able, by a deft interpretive move to be described below, to avoid challenging the central assumption of the tradition that the Odes represented morally paradigmatic attitudes, Ouyang nevertheless radically transformed the way that the Ode was read, producing a reading that was refreshingly simple and direct. It is for such reinterpretations that he is justly famous in the history of the reading of the Odes. (Van Zoeren 1991, p. 170)

Nonetheless, Ouyang Xiu's exegesis of *Shijing* remained embedded within a broader Lebensphilosophie. Subsequent Neo-Confucian scholars also critically addressed the propensity to employ *Shijing* for political interpretations. Cheng Yi (1033–1107), in particular, scrutinized *Shijing*'s efficacy in the refinement of individual character. He interpreted *Shijing* through the lens of the *Great Preface*, advocating for a methodological engagement with the text that transcends a mere literal comprehension. Cheng Yi encouraged readers to liberate themselves from subjective biases by engaging in *wanwei*, a meticulous and reflective exploration of the text, aiming to internalize its conveyed meanings deeply. While his approach was ostensibly pedagogical, Cheng Yi underscored the dynamic interplay between the reader and *Shijing*'s narrative, seeking to encapsulate the spectrum of emotions embedded within (Van Zoeren 1991, p. 209).

Zhu Xi (1130–1200), revered as one of the preeminent metaphysical thinkers in the annals of Confucian scholarship, navigated the interpretative landscape of *Shijing* with a discernible departure from elementary emotional expressions. He critiqued certain poems in *Shijing* as morally degenerate, which is a perspective steeped in ethical judgment. This stance, however, overlooks the fluidity and contextuality of moral standards across various epochs. Zhu Xi posited that Confucius intentionally incorporated these ostensibly debauched poems within *Shijing* as pedagogical counterexamples, which is a testament to the text's instructive underpinnings (Van Zoeren 1991, p. 229).

A brief examination of the interpretative traditions of *Shijing* reveals a tension between the traditions of exegesis and the affections expressed within *Shijing*'s text itself (Saussy 1993, p. 74). It is common practice to extricate verses from *Shijing* from their original contexts, imbuing them with new meanings. However, the Confucian school did not entirely forsake the affections found within *Shijing*. The founder of Confucianism, Confucius, did not hesitate to commend the beauty and sincerity of the sentiments within *Shijing*, as demonstrated by his statement: "In the [*Kwan-Ts'ü*], joy is found without frivolity; sorrow without detrimental effect" (Analects 3.20). In response to criticisms from other schools of thought, the Confucian scholars of the 2nd century BC refocused on the emotions within *Shijing* (Van Zoeren 1991, p. 54). The tradition of interpreting *Shijing*, particularly by Mencius, indeed discusses emotion, but it does so within the context of the relationship between emotion and *Zhi* (life's objectives) rather than as an unmediated, primal, unreflected sentiment (Van Zoeren 1991, pp. 112–13). The aim of this paper is to spotlight the unadulterated and unassigned genuine emotions within *Shijing*, attempting, through a

comparative analysis with the "Song of Songs", to uncover the reflections of universal emotional expressions inherent to humanity. If we accept the shared human nature across civilizations, we concur that engaging with *Shijing* facilitates Chinese readers in accessing the mystical theological context of Saint Bernard.

Prior to the reintroduction of Aristotle's works to Europe, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux emerged as a pivotal intellectual figure within the Latin world. His contributions were central to medieval spiritual thoughts, embodying both asceticism and mysticism. Notably, in Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, he is portrayed as the final guide through Paradise, and he is often celebrated as one of the last Church Fathers.

Saint Bernard's lifetime, spanning from the 11th to 12th centuries, coincided with the Crusades, a period marked by the emergence of the first cities in Western Europe, the zenith of Romanesque art, and the nascent stages of Gothic art. This era also witnessed the flourishing of vernacular literature, a resurgence in Latin classical texts and poetry, and the establishment of the foundational principles of Europe's first universities. Intellectual pursuits were predominantly driven by three movements: the Carthusian School, initiated by Guigues I le Chartreux; the Cistercian School, co-founded by Saint Bernard and his disciple Guillaume de Saint-Thierry; and the Victorine School, founded by Hugh of Saint Victor and Richard of Saint Victor (Gilson 1934, pp. 13–18).

Saint Bernard posited that the ultimate nature of intellect and transcendent love culminates in the superiority of love, which he argued is more conducive to the highest form of knowledge, or "unknowing". This stance is distinct from the later philosophy of "voluntarism". His exegetical work on the "Song of Songs"—*Sermons on the Song of Songs*—interprets this biblical book as a metaphor for mystical union, elevating human love to a divine level. His analysis diverges from the Platonist–Dionysian tradition of "ecstasy", offering a unique perspective on mystical experiences. Saint Bernard's primary emphasis was not on the uniqueness of his own experiences nor on portraying himself as superior to others. Rather, he sought to internalize his mystical experiences within the teachings of the Catholic Church and the traditions of the Bible.

2. The Similarities in the Description of Love between *Shijing* and the "Song of Songs"

Shijing is the beginning of ancient Chinese poetry, the earliest existing anthology of poems. It comprises a total of 305 poems from the 11th century BC to the 6th century BC. Formed before the establishment of the Confucian school, these poems describe the sentimental life of the Chinese people in ancient times. For reasons of space, it is not possible for us to compare these 305 poems one by one, but the author has selected eight of them as typical poems to be used for comparison with the "Song of Songs". It warrants emphasis that the arrangement of the poems discussed within this paper does not conform to the categorizations traditionally espoused by the Confucian tradition. This deviation assumes greater significance in light of the fact that certain scholars within ancient Confucianism interpreted the sequence within *Shijing* as underpinning a politico-cosmological framework. Given this perspective, maintaining fidelity to such a sequence is deemed less imperative in the context of this scholarly examination. We will find that there are many identical or similar sentiments about love in the two works.

The translations used in this paper are the ones of Arthur Waley's translation of *The Book of Songs* (Waley 1996). Nonetheless, Bernhard Karlgren's rendition of *Shijing* retains significant scholarly utility, notably through his meticulous preservation of the Chinese phonetic pronunciations for the titles of each poem within *Shijing*. As a result, despite my primary reliance on Arthur Waley's translations for analytical purposes, I have consistently included, in parentheses following each poem's title, the transliterated names as rendered by Bernhard Karlgren. This methodological approach facilitates the identification of specific texts within the corpus of *Shijing* across varying translation frameworks (Karlgren 1950). In an effort to circumvent the potential limitations associated with the exclusive use of one language to comprehend another, I have additionally referenced French versions of *Shijing*. The edition chosen for this purpose was translated by Pierre Vinclair (2019). This approach

enriches the analysis by introducing diverse linguistic perspectives in the text. The quotes from the "Song of Songs" in this paper are taken from the New American Bible version.

The first poem is called "Plop Fall the Plums (*Piao Yu Mei*)",

"Plop Fall the Plums
Plop fall the plums; but there are still seven.
Let those gentlemen that would court me
Come while it is lucky!
Plop fall the plums; there are still three.
Let any gentleman that would court me
Come before it is too late!
Plop fall the plums, in shallow baskets we lay them
Any gentleman who would court me
Had better speak while there is time".

The lady in the poem is encouraging her suitors to seize the opportunity without further delay or hesitation—a truly bold and progressive declaration. The poem directly shows the lady's inner thirst for love and that she wants to seek, urge, and call for love from males. When expressing her inner sentiments, the lady's tone of voice shows urgency and frankness without coyness. "Shedding is the plum-tree, its fruits are seven; . . .Shedding is the plum-tree, its fruits are three; . . .Shedding is the plum-tree, in a slanting basket I take them (the fruits)". By identifying herself with the ripening and falling plum, she expresses candidly that her youth is fading, and she wishes to cherish it by embracing love. So, when she expresses her feelings, she expresses them directly without beating around the bush so as to let her suiters know how ardent her desire for love is. The lady says directly to these men, "If any of you are fond of me, speak up quickly". We can see that the language is direct and forthright. In the French translation, the final sentence is rendered as "it is your turn to speak" (à vous de parler). This interpretation diverts the emphasis from temporal aspects to the act of speaking (parler), underscoring a particular embodiment associated with the mouth (Vinclair 2019, p. 50). In a similar vein, the "Song of Songs" begins with an unabashed expression of a lady's heart, "Let him kiss me with kisses of his mouth! More delightful is your love than wine! Your name spoken is a spreading perfume—that is why the maidens love you" (Song 1:2–3). The parallel between the forthright plea in *Piao Yu Mei* and the passionate yearning expressed in the "Song of Songs" underscores a timeless and universal longing for love. Just as the diminishing fruits of a plum tree, the lady's urgency reflects a keen awareness of the fleeting nature of youth and the importance of seizing the moment. This direct approach to expressing love, devoid of pretense and hesitation, highlights a boldness and clarity in communication that transcends cultures and epochs. The invocation of love in both poems serves as a reminder of the human desire for connection and intimacy, urging those who yearn to speak their heart's desire to do so without delay.

The second poem is called "Mad Boy (*Kiao T'ung*)", which goes as follows:

"That mad boy
Will not speak with me.
Yes, all because of you
I leave my rice untouched.
That mad boy
Will not eat with me.
Yes, it is all because of you
That I cannot take my rest".

The poem describes how a young lady, desiring a stroll and a picnic with her beau, feels disappointed. The inner sentiment described here is that of the lady's anxiety and resentment toward the object of her affection, which is due to the fact that her lover does not act in accordance with her expectations and that her emotional needs and expectations are

not met, thereby developing despondency. In the French translation, the translator employs "petit filou" to render *Kiao T'ung* (Vinclair 2019, p. 119), thereby diluting the connotations of condemnation inherent in "mad". The underlying significance of this choice merits further investigation. When lovers encounter frustration and disappointment within romantic relationships, the critical distinction lies in whether they attribute these feelings internally or externally. A narrow focus on the appellation "mad boy" may inadvertently overshadow the nuanced undertone of self-blame embedded within the anguish—evidently portrayed in the poem through her disturbed state, unable to find solace in eating or resting. A parallel disposition is articulated within the "Song of Songs", indicating a thematic resonance across these texts. The "Song of Songs" contains similar descriptions of inner activities, "tell me, you whom my heart loves, where you pasture your flock, where you give them rest at midday, Lest I be found wandering after the flocks of your companions" (Song 1:7). Both of these texts, in two different languages, express the frustration of the person who loves but cannot be requited. They express the initiative of the person who is unable to love and who, after being frustrated, turns to the pursuit of the object of his or her desire. This is clearly not a matter of cultural subtlety or exuberance but a reaction rooted in human nature. The essence of these verses lies in the raw depiction of longing and the turmoil of unreciprocated affection, painting a portrait of love's complexities that resonate deeply within the human psyche across different times and ages.

The third poem is called "Of Fair Girls (*Tsing Nü*)",

"Of fair girls the loveliest
Was to meet me at the comer of the Wall.
But she hides and will not show herself;
I scratch my head, pace up and down.
Of fair girls the prettiest
Gave me a red flute.
The flush of that red flute
Is pleasure at the girl's beauty.
She has been in the pastures and brought for me rush-wool,
Very beautiful and rare.
It is not you that are beautiful;
But you were given by a lovely girl".

This poem narrates from the perspective of a young male who is a little shy about giving a gift to the one he loves but feels great joy inside. The "Song of Songs" similarly describes the sincere sentiment of a lover who wants to put on the most beautiful object for his or her loved one: "We will make pendants of gold for you, and silver ornaments" (Song 1:11). In the face of the lover, it is natural for people, driven by voluntary generosity to give gifts to each other. This is not only to please each other but also as part of love's natural flow. It is not a transaction but an emotive tendency of human nature.

The fourth poem is known as "You with the Collar (*Tsi kin*)", a beloved classic that remains popular and relevant in today's Chinese society. Its full text is as follows:

"Oh, you with the blue collar,
On and on I think of you.
Even though I do not go to you,
You might surely send me news?
Oh, you with the blue collar.
Always and ever I long for you.
Even though I do not go to you.
You might surely sometimes come?
Here by the wall-gate
I pace to and fro.
One day when I do not see you
Is like three months".

We can see that one looks forward to his or her loved one's coming, and the "Song of Songs" also depicts such a mental activity, "My lover speaks; he says to me, Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, and come!" (Song 2:10) and "Until the day breathes cool and the shadows lengthen, roam, my lover, Like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of Bether" (Song 2:17). What these two texts describe is the lover's natural initiative and giving upon entering a romantic relationship, but also the desire for the loved one to be more proactive in demonstrating love for their partner.

The name of the fifth poem is "So Grand (*Kien Hi*)", which praises the body of the beloved one:

"So grand, so tall
He is just going to do the Wan dance;
Yes, just at noon of day,
In front of the palace, on a high place,
A big man, so warlike,
In the duke's yard he dances it.
He is strong as a tiger.
He holds chariot reins as though they were ribbons.
Now in his left hand he holds the flute.
In his right, the pheasant-plumes;
Red is he, as though smeared with ochre.
The duke hands him a goblet".
"On the hills grows a hazel-tree;
On the low ground the licorice.
Of whom do I think?
Of a fair lady from the West.
That fair lady
Is a lady from the West".

In this poem, the beloved man is tall and strong; he looks robust and flexible in dancing. When seeing his performance, the lady praises his beauty. Certainly, this poem represents an observer's commendation for a dancer, highlighting an evaluative moment transcending mere performance appreciation. Upon meticulous analysis, it is evident that the observer's reflections extend beyond the immediacy of the dance. Her considerations are not limited to the elegance of the dancer's movements; she explicitly recognizes the dancer's beauty and speculates about the dancer's place of origin. Although the dance scenario does not explicitly facilitate a direct emotional exchange between lovers, the emotional engagement of the female observer is undeniable. These emotions, in a comprehensive sense, may be classified as manifestations of love, propelled by the intrinsic instincts characteristic of human nature. In the English translation, the term "fair lady" is used to describe the dancer, which introduces a degree of ambiguity. In contrast, the French version opts for "belles personnes" (Vinclair 2019, p. 70), a choice that accentuates the poem's exploration of a broader human psychological state—one that recognizes the beloved's beauty in a gender-neutral manner. While the focus of this discussion is not on historical accuracy, it is imperative to acknowledge certain pervasive phenomena within human societies. Generally, dancers performing in public and receiving accolades from individuals of higher social standing tend to occupy a lower social echelon. On the contrary, women in antiquity who had the means to be spectators at such performances were likely of a comparatively elevated social status. Therefore, the poem embodies not merely an expression of genuine emotion but also a candor unobscured by the veneer of civilization. In the "Song of Songs", there are several descriptions of songs celebrating the figure of the beloved, "Ah, you are beautiful, my beloved, ah, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves! Ah, you are beautiful, my lover—yes, you are lovely. Our couch, too, is verdant" (Song 1:15–16). In *Kien Hi*, the red face of the beloved man attracts the lady. The "Song of Songs" contains precisely the exact same description, "My lover is radiant and ruddy; he stands out among thousands" (Song 5:10). There are more specific descriptions and metaphors about the beauty of the

beloved in the "Song of Songs", "Ah, you are beautiful, my beloved, ah, you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats streaming down the mountains of Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of ewes to be shorn, which come up from the washing, All of them big with twins, none of them thin and barren. Your lips are like a scarlet strand; your mouth is lovely. Your cheek is like a half-pomegranate behind your veil. Your neck is like David's tower girt with battlements; A thousand bucklers hang upon it, all the shields of valiant men. Your breasts are like twin fawns, the young of a gazelle that browse among the lilies" (Song 4:1–5). It is not the intention of this paper to examine the meaning of the symbolism behind these different descriptions in terms of metaphor and analogy, and in the purest and most basic sense, we find that what is described in both *Shijing* and the "Song of Songs" is that the lover looks at his or her loved one and finds him or her to be extremely beautiful, and therefore praises him or her. This is a common occurrence in romantic relationships.

The sixth poem is so classic it is known as "The Ospreys Cry (*Kwan-Ts'ü*)", and it is as follows in its full text,

"'Fair, fair', cry the ospreys
On the island in the river.
Lovely is this noble lady,
Fit bride for our lord.
In patches grows the water mallow;
To left and right one must seek it.
Shy was this noble lady;
Day and night he sought her.
Sought her and could not get her;
Day and night he grieved.
Long thoughts, oh, long unhappy thoughts.
Now on his back, now tossing on to his side.
In patches grows the water mallow;
To left and right one must gather it.
Shy is this noble lady;
With great zither and little we hearten her.
In patches grows the water mallow;
To left and right one must choose it.
Shy is this noble lady;
With bells and drums we will gladden her".

The poem is an expression of a young man who pursues a lady of his choice, but he does not obtain a response from the lady. Therefore, the man cannot sleep at night due to his unrequited love. In this poem, the man projects his emotions of pining for and not being able to sleep on such images as trees and rivers. And in the "Song of Songs", the expression of having trouble sleeping is present because he misses his lover and cannot: "I was sleeping, but my heart kept vigil; I heard my lover knocking: Open to me, my sister, my beloved, my dove, my perfect one! For my head is wet with dew, my locks with the moisture of the night" (Song 5:2). The "Song of Songs" also uses images of the external environment to show inner sentiments. Both texts detail scenarios wherein individuals, due to intense affection, find themselves unable to sleep, lying awake with thoughts of their beloved. This depiction serves to underscore the universality of such sentimental experiences across different cultures. Furthermore, due to the intensity and ineffability of such sentiment, individuals are compelled to use external objects as metaphors to express these experiences of sentiment.

The seventh poem is called In the "Wilds Is a Dead Doe (*Ye Yu Si Kun*)" and contains direct descriptions and exclamations of the body's instinctive tendencies:

"In the wilds there is a dead doe;
With white rushes we cover her.

There was a lady longing for the spring;
A fair knight seduced her.
In the wood there is a clump of oaks,
And in the wilds a dead deer
With white rushes well bound;
There was a lady fair as jade.
'Heigh, not so hasty, not so rough;
Heigh, do not touch my handkerchief-
Take care, or the dog will bark'".

In "Song of Songs" (Song 7:12–13), the following line is given: "Bring me, O king, to your chambers. With you we rejoice and exult, we extol your love; it is beyond wine: how rightly you are loved!" (Song 1:4); furthermore, "He brings me into the banquet hall and his emblem over me is love" (Song 2:4). This is also one of the characteristics of love between men and women. We consider that love should be tangible and alive and that love between men and women often involves physical contact. Even if it has not yet occurred or is in the process of taking place, the differences and connections at the physical level profoundly influence the progression and manifestation of love between men and women.

The eighth poem is called "Peach-Tree (*T'ao Yao*)", which goes as follows:

"Buxom is the peach-tree;
How its flowers blaze!
Our lady going home
Brings good to family and house.
Buxom is the peach-tree;
How its fruit swells!
Our lady going home
Brings good to family and house.
Buxom is the peach-tree;
How thick its leaves!
Our lady going home
Brings good to the people of her house".

This poem describes the flourishing of flowers and leaves, symbolizing the sweet and beautiful stage of love. And a similar expression is found in the "Song of Songs", "The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines, in bloom, give forth fragrance" (Song 2:13). Therefore, we can see that the "Song of Songs" depicts the same wonderful season. Because of the great geographical differences, we cannot expect the Jerusalem area to have exactly the same vegetation as northern China. However, we find that both *Shijing* and the "Song of Songs" chose to describe a fruit-bearing tree and describe the beautiful state of these fruit trees during the fruit-bearing season. The difference is that in the "Song of Songs", the sentence describing the scent of flowers is placed after the fruit tree, which seems to imply that the scent of flowers is the more graceful level.

In summary, in comparing eight poems from *Shijing* with passages from the "Song of Songs", both texts reveal common portrayals of love, articulating a universal longing for idealized romance and depicting the simultaneous presence of joy and sorrow in relationships. Gift-giving among lovers, inherently spontaneous, underscores a mutual desire for connection without the expectation of return. Engaging in a romantic relationship amplifies the lovers' suffering due to temporary separations, fostering a yearning for continuous companionship. Physical intimacy serves as a marker of a deeper emotional bond, with both parties seeking greater fulfillment and happiness despite their physical limitations. Through the comparative analysis of *Shijing* and the "Song of Songs", identifying commonalities depicted across different civilizations, it can be posited that Chinese readers' engagement with *Shijing* would facilitate their understanding of Saint Bernard's sermons on the "Song of Songs".

3. Viewing *Shijing* through the Lens of Saint Bernard's Sermons

Saint Bernard devoted eighteen years (1135–1153) to the composition of his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, placing profound emphasis on the experience of communion with the divine. He approached the "Song of Songs" with the spirit of a mystic, offering a mystical interpretation that underscored the intricacies of human and divine interaction. Regarding the comparison between Saint Bernard's *Sermons on the Song of Songs* and other vernacular literature, Brigitte Saouma (2016) and Marie-Madeleine Davy (1968) conducted some exceptional work. The innovation of this paper is the attempt to compare Saint Bernard's thoughts with *Shijing*. It is observed that his theological exegesis of the "Song of Songs", when applied to *Shijing*, reveals numerous ingenious parallels and congruences.

Before employing Saint Bernard's theology to analyze *Shijing*, the concept of "love" within Saint Bernard's theological thought is introduced first. It is imperative to acknowledge, at the outset, that an examination of Saint Bernard's writings might reveal an inclination towards a Christocentric interpretation of love. This paper does not purport to defend a doctrinal position. Nonetheless, a more nuanced comprehension of Saint Bernard's core perspectives is facilitated by an appreciation of the historical and personal context in which he operated, alongside the interpretative heritage of the "Song of Songs" within Christian theology. Saint Bernard's epoch was marked by the ascendancy of European Monasticism, distinguished by its advocacy for the eschewal of terrestrial pursuits in favor of celestial aspirations. Serving as an abbot, his literary corpus predominantly sought to explicate the Gospel and elucidate Christian doctrine. In the sphere of Christian exegesis of the "Song of Songs", prior to Saint Bernard, the commentaries by Origen of Alexandria and Saint Gregory the Great were notably influential. Their analyses converged on the allegorical identification of the Song's male protagonist with Christ and the female protagonist with either the Church or the individual soul. Saint Bernard endorsed this allegorical framework, with a particular emphasis on the latter allegory, thereby situating his interpretations within a well-established theological tradition.

Saint Bernard perceives love as an initial, albeit imperfect, state that, through deliberate effort, strives for improvement. This transformative process is inherently painful. He metaphorically relates the nascent monastic commitment to the evolving love between a man and a woman, highlighting the initial incompleteness of love (Bernard de Clairvaux 2006, p. 319). According to Saint Bernard, it is essential for an individual to continually engage in self-examination and purification to enhance their love for God. In Saint Bernard's view, as articulated by Christian Trottmann in *La Vision Béatifique*, this purification of love parallels a journey towards deeper understanding and assimilation, where purified love aligns more closely with divine charity and proximity to God (Trottmann 1995, pp. 99–100).

In the cosmic hierarchy, God reigns with ultimate majesty, distinguishing the Creator from the created humanity, with an infinite divide. "Her fervent love leads her to such intoxication that she disregards the Bridegroom's majesty" (Bernard de Clairvaux 2006, p. 161). Charity empowers humans to transcend fear, a fear that is rooted in the inherent unworthiness of divine love. Yet, through God's love, fear is cast out by perfect love. There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love (1 John 4:18). It is noteworthy that the exchange of love between man and God is reciprocal, not transactional, predicated on genuine charity towards God (Bernard de Clairvaux 1993, pp. 102–4). This love, inherently rewarding, is not motivated by the expectation of reward, thus fostering a spontaneous and satisfying relationship with the divine.

In his first sermon of the *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, Saint Bernard posits that the "Song of Songs" occupies an exceptionally elevated status. Only a true lover will be capable of grasping its meaning. This canticle is not intended for the general populace; only those who sing and listen to it will have access. "It is truly a nuptial song, expressing the chaste and joyful embraces of the spirits, the harmony of customs" (Bernard de Clairvaux 1993, p. 76). For Saint Bernard, the relationship between humans and God is akin to that of a bride and bridegroom in a state of perfection.

Undoubtedly, Saint Bernard never read *Shijing*. Moreover, he knew no Hebrew, rendering him incapable of reading the original text of the "Song of Songs". If his interpretation of the "Song of Songs" was grounded in an understanding of human emotions and constructed using medieval philosophical and theological methodologies, then it should be permissible to apply his interpretative approach to *Shijing*. This endeavor is not aimed at doctrinal innovation but rather at exploring the similarities within human nature across different civilizations.

The opening of the "Song of Songs" states, "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is more delightful than wine. Your name is a perfume poured out; no wonder the maidens love you" (Song 1:2–3). Saint Bernard finds this opening quite abrupt, suggesting the presence of some unspoken matters preceding this initiation (Bernard de Clairvaux 2006, p. 66). In other words, there exists a prior offering of love, leading to the expressed desire for kisses in the opening of the "Song of Songs". "Similarly, the call in the poem *Piao Yu Mei* resonates with this sentiment: "seeking me are several gentlemen, may it come to its being lucky! seeking me are several gentlemen, may it come to (its being now) a decision now!", translating to an appeal for cherishing the moment and making a timely decision by the suitors. Evidently, the text of *Piao Yu Mei* also presupposes the offering of love by "several gentlemen". Saint Bernard interprets this as the divine's precedence in loving and seeking us before we do. This anticipation mirrors the "Patriarchs' fervent hope for the birth of Christ" (Bernard de Clairvaux 2006, p. 82). Through this interpretation, Saint Bernard elevates the simple mutual longing between a man and a woman to the collective human anticipation and hope for the Savior, namely, Christ.

In his third sermon (Bernard de Clairvaux 2006, p. 108), Saint Bernard offers an interpretation of "Song of Songs" 1:7, which goes, "Tell me, you whom my heart loves, where you pasture your flock, where you give them rest at midday, lest I be found wandering after the flocks of your companions". He posits that this verse contrasts two states of being. The first state is one in which a person cannot find his beloved and thus fails to approach her, "lying in ashes" (Bernard de Clairvaux 2006, p. 108), experiencing pain and disgrace. In this state, the lover's yearning to find the beloved echoes the cry in "Come, says my heart, seek his face; your face, Lord, do I seek!" (Psalms 27:8) and in "Tell me, you whom my heart loves, where you pasture your flock, where you give them rest at midday, lest I be found wandering after the flocks of your companions" (Song 1:7). This is akin to the sentiments expressed in the poem *Kiao T'ung* of *Shijing*, "it is all your fault, but it makes me unable to eat" and "it is all your fault, but it makes me unable to rest". Saint Bernard suggests that the second state is described by "In the morning let me hear of your mercy, for in you I trust. Show me the path I should walk, for I entrust my life to you" (Psalms 143:8), "where at sunrise, the soul of the servant is gladdened" (Psalms 86:4), and "abounding joy in your presence" (Psalms 16:11). Unlike the first state, this second state is characterized by an interesting point Saint Bernard makes is the dual nature of the beloved as both sweet and stern, "Ah! Sweet Lord, Ah! Severe Lord!" (Bernard de Clairvaux 2006, p. 110). The sweetness stems from His goodness and beauty, while the severity comes from His absence, thereby creating a tension that is the source of the seeker's pain. The direct statement from *Kiao T'ung*, "it makes me unable to rest", encapsulates this pain of seeking. This represents the essence of love and the reality of life on earth. Even when one finds God and enters into a loving relationship with Him, the sufferings of the world are unavoidable, and love cannot be wholly sweet. Saint Bernard argues that the fluctuation between joy and pain in the love described in the "Song of Songs" is due to the incompleteness of love, not a flaw in love itself. Similarly, the portrayal of the beloved in *Kiao T'ung* reflects this mixture of pain and joy, not because the relationship is malevolent but because love has not reached its fulfillment. According to the interpretation of Saint Bernard, this condition, referenced in both texts, is a manifestation of human common sense. Experiencing pain in love does not imply that love is fundamentally flawed. Instead, it indicates that love, in its nascent stages and rooted in the natural realm, may encompass suffering, risk, and potential self-harm. Saint Bernard argues that love, which he believes is

derived from a transcendent source—God—necessitates external moderation at this stage. As a consequence of such transcendental moderation, love becomes more beautiful and perfected over time (Bernard de Clairvaux 1993, pp. 118–20).

The exchange of gifts between lovers is a commonplace occurrence. Saint Bernard's focus is not on the symbolic significance of the items designed as gifts, which often varies greatly across different cultures. Rather, Saint Bernard uncovers an intriguing paradox in this matter; he proposes that the glory of love is only attainable by the recipient when they believe themselves to be unworthy of such a gift. This is because if the recipient deems himself deserving of beautiful gifts, this implies a sense of obligation on the part of the giver. Consequently, upon receiving a gift, the recipient would not experience surprise, and thus, the glory and joy of love remain unfelt. However, when the recipient considers himself unworthy of beautiful gifts and receives them nonetheless, they realize that despite their unworthiness, the lover compensates this deficit with love, bestowing upon the recipient the symbolic glory of the gift and, therefore, happiness (Bernard de Clairvaux 2000, pp. 220–22). Saint Bernard evidently approaches the concept of "a lover's gift" with certain presuppositions. His premise is that the lover represents the supreme God, with a significant status disparity between the lover and the beloved. True love, however, transcends this distance, be it physical or psychological. More importantly, in the realm of love, the act of giving gifts occurs naturally. The verses of *Tsing Nü* do not explicitly involve a deity of immense dignity, yet in human romantic relationships, not all are characterized by complete equality in social status. The authors of *Shijing* must have observed this as well, suggesting that, even though they might not have contemplated a divine being with personhood, the depiction of romantic relationships in *Tsing Nü* can fully accommodate the image of God and the relationship of divine love as described in Saint Bernard's theology. In the act of gift-giving between lovers, Saint Bernard discerns underlying issues, including whether the glory represented by the gift is deserved by the recipient, and how to confront disparities in status among lovers. Within the scenarios depicted in the "Song of Songs", Saint Bernard advances the notion that pure love enables lovers to overlook differences in status (Bernard de Clairvaux 2006, p. 163), and this is certainly true in *Shijing.* Discrepancies in social standing, and even ontological gaps, do not hinder the act of loving between individuals. Hence, the purer the love, the more capable it is of penetrating distances.

In his twenty-fifth sermon, Saint Bernard offers commentary on "Song of Songs" 2:10, and his insight can be very useful for a comparative analysis of the below two texts, "even though I have not gone (to you), why do you not come?" in *Tsi Kin*, and "Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, and come" in Song 2:10. Both texts evidently express a longing for the beloved's arrival. However, Saint Bernard interprets this longing from a more symbolic perspective, situating this anticipation within the framework of chronology, where "the arrival of the beloved" has not yet occurred. Undoubtedly, this event is characterized as "imminent" or "in the future", for if there is no willingness to "arrive" on the part of the anticipated one, it would not constitute a relationship of love. Saint Bernard's focus is on the aspect that "the lover is about to arrive but has not yet arrived" (Bernard de Clairvaux 1998, p. 262). He suggests that this signifies the incomplete journey towards Christ, meaning one is progressing on the correct path but has not yet reached the destination. This interpretation also applies to the line "I am dark but lovely" (Song 1:5). The apparent contradiction of being "dark but lovely" mirrors the actual condition of those enmeshed in worldly love. Lovers of the world are imperfect, and despite feelings of unworthiness and inferiority, love endows individuals with the strength and courage to pursue. Utilizing Saint Bernard's interpretation to reconsider the poem *Tsi Kin*, one might propose the following interpretation: if "you" (*Tsi*) refers to the Savior, Christ, then the "yet to come" of "you" (*Tsi*) can be understood as the yearning and anticipation for the Savior by those who have not yet heard the Gospel. The anticipation of a beloved's presence constitutes a quintessential human sentiment. Yet, from an analytical perspective, the existential condition of humanity predicates that the beloved can never

fully manifest in the temporal realm. This is attributed to the fact that, notwithstanding the physical proximity of the beloved, an everlasting cohabitation (both in physical and spiritual terms) remains unfeasible. Saint Bernard posits that this phenomenon underscores the intrinsic imperfection of terrestrial love. However, individuals who have savored the sweetness of affection are predisposed to endure contemporary tribulations in the pursuit of transcendent love. This alludes to the celestial communion between humans and the divine in the afterlife (Bernard de Clairvaux 1993, p. 130).

Lovers, when yearning for their beloved, invariably experience a mix of joy and distress. Saint Bernard de Clairvaux (1998, p. 222) also notes the scenario where the lover lies in bed, unable to sleep. He considers this as a paradoxical state. Initially, lying in bed attempting to sleep ostensibly reflects a sense of security, a state of tranquility. This represents the lover's sense of safety within the romantic relationship. However, the person lying in bed does not truly find peace, as they are unable to fall asleep, anxiously pondering over their romantic ties. Saint Bernard terms it "the sweet sorrow" (Bernard de Clairvaux 1998, p. 222). As implied in *Kwan-Ts'ü*, this sorrow is characteristic of an early stage in love, where mutual understanding and trust are less established. Within the lexicon of his medieval mystical theology, Saint Bernard describes, "This is not the room of the husband" (Bernard de Clairvaux 1998, p. 224). The essence of love is such that one feels restless upon attainment yet yearns for reacquisition upon loss. It is precisely because "This is not the room of the husband" that the lover cannot attain perfect rest. In other words, only if the lovers perfectly unite, entering a state of perfection, can this restlessness be alleviated. Viewing this sentiment from the perspective of the lover, we find it to be both joyful and sorrowful. However, this does not imply that the relationship must progress to perfection. Further analyzing the scenario described jointly by *Kwan-Ts'ü* and "Song of Songs" 5:2, we ascertain that the root of this distress is fundamentally the absence of the beloved. As not every love story culminates in fulfillment, the absence of the beloved does not necessarily mean he or she will be present in the future. Building on the scenario depicted in *Kwan-Ts'ü*, we can envisage the subsequent journey of the couple, potentially culminating in perfect union or separation. In his fifty-sixth sermon, Saint Bernard analyzes two outcomes and directions for the absence of the beloved (Bernard de Clairvaux 2003, pp. 142–44). The first scenario involves the beloved's temporary departure out of compassion, posing no significant harm, whereas, in the second scenario, the beloved departs in anger, signifying the failure of love. The former is due to the lover being a holy person, while the latter is because the lover is sinful and unwilling to repent. In "Song of Songs" 5:2, which states, "my sister, my beloved, my dove, my perfect one!" Saint Bernard sees this as beautiful imagery, symbolizing the absence of terror in love (Bernard de Clairvaux 2003, p. 135). Notably, the trees and rivers described in *Kwan-Ts'ü* are also favorable symbols. According to Saint Bernard's mystical theology, there is no fear in love. Even in its nascent stages, love is not an entity of ugliness and evil. Even though lovers may experience suffering, it does not stem from inherent malice or wicked intentions. Being referred to as a "dove" highlights the intimacy and trust within love.

In his sixth sermon, Saint Bernard quotes a woman's grand praise of her husband's legs, which are likened, according to the woman, to be "columns of marble resting on golden bases" (Song 5:15). In his view, the praise of beauty is essentially a celebration of virtue, with the most perfect virtues embodied in Jesus Christ. Therefore, we can deduce that, following Saint Bernard's interpretative approach, the laudation of the lover's physical beauty symbolizes the love for Christ (Bernard de Clairvaux 2006, p. 148). In his twenty-eighth sermon, Saint Bernard analyzes the lover's ruddy cheeks and beauty. According to St. Bernard, the ruddy hue of the cheeks serves as a symbol of martyrdom, while beauty symbolizes virginity (Bernard de Clairvaux 1998, p. 366). Martyrdom signifies the lover's sacrifice for the beloved, even to the point of offering his own life; virginity signifies the lover's esteem for the beloved, hence the willingness to endure and wait. From a natural perspective, Saint Bernard emphasizes the significance of "ruddiness" and "beauty" as indispensable in a loving relationship. This is also reflected in *Kien Hi*, with phrases like

"he is shining as if smeared with red" and "The tall man is very great". Furthermore, Saint Bernard references other biblical passages: "Who is this that comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments, from Bozrah—This one arrayed in majesty, marching in the greatness of his strength?" (Isaiah 63:1), and "crowned him with glory and honor" (Psalms 8:6). He situates the romantic sentiments described in the "Song of Songs" within a broader narrative of salvation, viewing them as symbols of the lover and as manifestations of perfect love with Christ. In worldly romantic relationships, one naturally praises the physical and facial beauty of the beloved, even when such beauty may not be widely acknowledged. However, out of love, one naturally perceives it as beautiful. Saint Bernard introduces a symbolic meaning, interpreting the praise of beauty as a willingness to sacrifice and to show esteem, which is an aspect often valued in romantic relationships. In essence, according to Saint Bernard, there is no absolute disconnection between worldly love and love for Christ; noble qualities in earthly love can also symbolize aspects of the relationship between humans and Christ within the history of salvation.

In his twenty-third sermon, Saint Bernard comments on the depiction of a more intimate relationship between lovers as described in the "Song of Songs", which is also portrayed in *Ye Yu Si Kun*. Saint Bernard notes that such an intimacy initially arises from an attraction to the beloved's virtuous characteristics, metaphorically referred to as "perfume" in the "Song of Songs" (Bernard de Clairvaux 1998, p. 198). Following the experience of deeper intimacy, the relationship between the lovers advances further. Saint Bernard describes this as "entering the bedroom". Entering the bedroom symbolizes a state of consummation in the love relationship. Here, Saint Bernard references Saint Paul's description, "We no longer see God there as troubled with anger or held back by his occupations, but may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect" (Romans 12:2). This vision does not frighten, but rather enchants. Indeed, "it doesn't arouse anxious curiosity, on the contrary, it calms it; it doesn't tire the senses but reassures them. This is true rest. The God of serenity makes all things serene. To contemplate Him in His rest is to rest oneself" (Bernard de Clairvaux 1998, p. 234). In Saint Bernard's view, intimacy no longer pertains to the initial unease and trepidation of love but moves toward peace and fulfillment. Individuals find rest and rejuvenation in the tranquility of beautiful love. In his seventh sermon, Saint Bernard emphasizes that the depiction in "Song of Songs" 2:4 is not a celebration of carnal desires. "Indeed, her love is chaste, for she seeks the one she loves and nothing that belongs to him. Her love is holy, for she loves not in the lust of the flesh but in the purity of spirit. Her love is fervent, for she is so intoxicated with this love that she no longer thinks of the majesty of the Husband" (Bernard de Clairvaux 2006, p. 158). According to Saint Bernard, the intimacy of love includes the physical aspect but is not limited to it. The spirit of love transcends the natural order, allowing the heart to approach God's altar, thus highlighting the transcendence of love. Evidently, Saint Bernard's interpretation extends beyond the literal meaning contained within the texts of the "Song of Songs", yet it is not contrary to the spirit contained within these texts. Though it is not a religious text, one can certainly apply the same principle of interpretation to *Ye Yu Si Kun*. Through simple human experiences, we find this also to be an expression of perfect love across various cultures. Within the context of Christianity, it is a manifestation of the relationship of love between God and humanity.

"Song of Songs" 2:13 and *T'ao Yao* exhibit a certain similarity. Although peach and fig trees are distinct species, these plants can be considered interchangeable from the perspective of symbols of love. Saint Bernard posits that the sweetest time in the air is when the fig tree produces its green fruit (Bernard de Clairvaux 2003, p. 222). The fig tree serves merely as a symbol, representing human love. Despite being unripe, naive, and limited, it still embodies the potential for infinite goodness. Saint Bernard suggests that fruit-bearing trees resemble individuals whose behavior is more "friendly". The lush foliage and abundant fruit are the result of the tree's collective effort, embodying a spirit of union and communion, both of which are vital and fruitful. From a natural standpoint, the fruit tree is already perfect (Bernard de Clairvaux 2000, pp. 236–38). As stated in "Song

of Songs" 2:13, the fruit tree merely represents a preparatory stage. The fruit of the tree may not always be sweet, but the fragrance is invariably delightful. Fruit symbolizes the initial stage of love, while fragrance represents the fulfillment of love. Therefore, superior is the fragrance of grapes. Saint Bernard does not dismiss natural love; he merely considers it insufficiently beautiful. With the addition of grace, the bitterness of love is removed. He praises the love among lovers in the world yet considers it an imperfect manifestation of the love between people and God. External beauty is imperfect, whereas the scent of flowers, though invisible, symbolizes perfect love. Quoting Paul's famous maxim, "Love never fails. If there are prophecies, they will be brought to nothing; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be brought to nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:8). Saint Bernard explains that in the perfect stage of love, many external manifestations disappear, and he makes an analogy to grape vines. Saint Bernard deems this love of vines as loving God "with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Bernard de Clairvaux 2003, p. 238). It progresses from the stage of the fig fruit towards perfection. The process requires acts of charity, repentance, and letting perfect love cast out fear. The former seems more pronounced in love for one's neighbor, while the latter is in love for God. According to Saint Bernard, these are not in opposition or fundamentally different but vary according to the stages of love. If we liken the peach trees described in *T'ao Yao* to the fig trees in the "Song of Songs", we find that the sweet love described by the peach trees implies the potential to become more perfect. The beauty described by peach trees has a very limited temporal boundary. The lady described in *T'ao Yao*, although in a state of beautiful happiness, undoubtedly needs an open mind towards an eternal world if she seeks longer-lasting happiness. This is precisely the theological perspective that Saint Bernard constructs from his analysis of "Song of Songs" 2:13.

4. Conclusions

Through the comparison and analysis of the *Shijing* and the "Song of Songs", similarities have been identified that symbolize the universal aspects of human nature in the perception and expression of love. These parallels blaze a new trail, suggesting the possibility for Chinese readers to embrace Saint Bernard's theological interpretations of the Songs of Songs. The potential for such cross-cultural understanding is not only viable but also enriches Chinese readers' comprehension of medieval theology in a more holistic manner. Saint Bernard authored numerous works, among which the *Sermons on the Song of Songs* is a significant component. By leveraging their understanding of the *Shijing*, Chinese readers can more effectively engage with Saint Bernard's theology, thereby circumventing biased interpretations of his writings. Nygren (1953, p. 649) sharply differentiates between *eros* and *agape*, positing that Saint Bernard's conception of love is predominantly *eros* with Neoplatonic influences. Nygren critiques Saint Bernard and his medieval contemporaries for not attempting to reformulate the Caritas synthesis, instead persisting in an *eros*-based understanding of love. He likens Saint Bernard's theoretical framework of love to a Gothic church: secularly grounded yet striving heavenward. Despite their aesthetic appeal, Nygren contends that such structures symbolize the theoretical foundation of love as "something as earthly and human, far too human, as natural self-love" (Nygren 1953, p. 650), failing to reach the divine. He suggests that Saint Bernard's sophisticated treatment of Caritas inadvertently results in a moralistic love doctrine "as remote as possible from the Agape-love of Christianity" (Nygren 1953, p. 651). In my view, Nygren's interpretation of Saint Bernard is biased. Nicolas Perrier critiques Nygren for exclusively concentrating on *On Loving God*, neglecting Saint Bernard's *Sermon on the Song of Songs* (Perrier 1953). Nygren adopts a binary viewpoint, whereas Saint Bernard acknowledges the ambiguity of affections, advocating for a singular love that necessitates purification—a goal of human pursuit, unattainable in the earthly domain.

Dom Fernand Cabrol OSB contends that Saint Bernard exhibits a lack of humanitarian concern, analyzing the divergent spiritual orientations of Cluny and Cîteaux, with the latter centered around Saint Bernard (Cabrol 1928). He identifies two distinct thoughts

since the inception of Christianity: the asceticism represented by John the Baptist and the humanitarianism of Jesus Christ. While acknowledging Saint Bernard's simplicity, passionate love for God, and self-sacrifice, Cabrol overlooks his interpretation of the "Song of Songs". In Saint Bernard's writings, an appreciation for worldly aspects is evident. To him, the love between a man and a woman is not only beautiful but also crucial, mirroring the perfect relationship between humans and God. The relationships among people, including those with neighbors and guests, are significant as they embody the practice of charity.

Ironically, Nygren accuses Saint Bernard of prioritizing human nature over the divine, favoring human love over sacred love, while Cabrol charges him with an overemphasis on asceticism, neglecting human aspects. These disparate critiques of Saint Bernard intriguingly unifies in their collective misreading of his interpretation of the "Song of Songs". The notable misinterpretations of Saint Bernard by Nygren and Cabrol fundamentally stem from their neglect of his exegesis on the "Song of Songs".

This paper reveals substantial similarities between *Shijing* and the "Song of Songs" in their representations of love. Understanding Saint Bernard's mystical theology through these similarities, Chinese cultural readers can sidestep the errors Nygren and Cabrol encountered.

Is there someone who loved me before I expressed my love? Pursuing this query to its ultimate conclusion, what do we discover? In love, the intertwining of suffering and joy prompts the following question: how can one achieve purely joyful love? In addressing love's inherent inequalities, what approach should lovers take? Given that profound love often seems transient, can eternal love exist? Approaching these concerns shared by *Shijing* and the "Song of Songs", in an attempt to comprehend Saint Bernard's mystical theology, we may arrive at a more comprehensive doctrine of love as proposed by Saint Bernard. It is neither purely secular, carnal, worldly love nor entirely ascetic or self-denying love. Rather, it is a form of affection that can manifest between men and women but is not confined to this; it is purified continuously in the world and put into practice through actions, thereby gradually approaching divine love.

Discussions on love remain perpetually captivating and inexhaustible, with romantic love between men and women representing one of the most intimate and enigmatic forms among various types of love. It demands the holistic engagement of individuals, encompassing both the body and the soul. The "Song of Songs" reflects the divine communication to humanity, while *Shijing* embodies the early philosophical thought in Chinese civilization and is among the few Confucian texts that directly depict romantic love. Through the analyses of this paper, we discover significant parallels in the early love poetry within both Chinese and Hebrew civilizations, indicating their openness to transcendence. Although Christianity does not regard *Shijing* as divine revelation but something that originated from humanity's most fundamental and simple emotions, an understanding of the love described in *Shijing* can aid readers within Chinese culture to comprehend the "Song of Songs" and enter into the context of Saint Bernard's mystical theology. Saint Bernard identified a pathway between human love and divine love. For readers within Chinese culture, *Shijing* serves as a steppingstone onto this path.

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