

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

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## Introduction

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle attempts to utilize a physical theology as a form of ascent to contemplative philosophy. He also states that this study is to be chosen over all other sciences; and it is this “first science of theology”<sup>1</sup> that we must prefer to all other kinds of contemplation, the study of the divine. Through the 2nd century C.E. and onward, the development of Christian theology was partly inspired by interpretations of Neoplatonism-- a period of time after Plato that began with the successors of Plato’s Academy, including Aristotle and later Proclus. This essay will focus on St. Thomas Aquinas’ view of God in *Prima Pars* of *Summa Theologica* contrasted with Plato’s view of the *One* in *Parmenides*, with its further elucidation by Proclus’ *Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides*.<sup>2</sup> This paper will examine the dialectics of **I. what can be said of the *One*/God beyond *Being*** and **II. what can be said of the *One*/God coordinate with *Being***.

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

#### General introduction to the Negations

This section of the study will focus on the relationship between the *One* in the first hypothesis of Plato’s *Parmenides*, as further articulated by Proclus, and Thomas Aquinas’ view of God in the highest sense. Proclus defines a “hypothesis” as “that which takes part of the procedure and produces similar conclusions, either all affirmative or all negative or both.”<sup>3</sup>

The first hypothesis in Plato’s *Parmenides* dialectically explores the *One* as superior to *Being* and to all other things, by intelligibly negating all predicates that could in turn be said of the *One* coordinate with *Being*. While affirmations are considered positive in the world of empirical sciences, the negations present in the *Parmenides* are higher and beyond the former, since they are most fit to describe what is transcendent all knowledge and perception. For Plato denies that the *One* is or is not but even negation itself.<sup>4</sup> Plato’s hypothesis reaches the truly ineffable. In this following section the discussion will refrain from affirmatively attributing any physical predicates of God and will deal only with denials of all sorts of categories of *beings*, whether they may be intellectual or corporeal.

#### The Cloud of Unknowing

St. Thomas Aquinas says in the *Summa Theologica*: "He is supremely undivided inasmuch as *He* is divided, neither actually nor potentially, by any

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books, 2004), VI, 1026a.

<sup>2</sup> Proclus, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), Introduction, p. 13, 37.

<sup>3</sup> Proclus, VI, 1052ff., In the same passage Proclus further clarifies this definition: “It makes no difference to them whether we draw these conclusions in relation to itself or to something else, but only that the *quality* of the proposition is the same”.

<sup>4</sup> Plato, *Parmenides*, trans. F. M. Cornford (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973), 142b.

mode of division; since *He* is altogether simple.”<sup>5</sup> This kind of language strongly reverberates Aristotelian terminology, later further discussed in this text. Similarly, Plato affirms: “If there is a *One*, of course the *One* will not be many.”<sup>6</sup> When referring to God, St. Thomas utilizes *He* while in Attic Greek, the terminology of *αὐτός* frequently denotes in Plato a relation with excellence in the divine. From these two passages follows that that which is beyond all things must be a pure *One*, possessing no parts and being fully undivided. It would be relevant to question whether the *One* and God are the same, similar or different in the view of these thinkers. Since it has been shown that both Plato and St. Thomas explore a supreme oneness of the *One*/God, the discussion ought to move on to what follows from the latter’s assertion, that God is supremely *One*, by using an abbreviated form of a Platonic inspired method through the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* when discussing the ineffable *One*.

If God is one, *He* cannot be many. *He* cannot be a whole, for a whole is made of parts. *He* cannot have a beginning, middle, end, or shape. God is not anywhere, being neither in *Himself* nor in another. If *He* were in *Himself*, *He* would be both container and contained, while being *One*. If *He* were in another, *He* would be encompassed by that in which it is contained, and that is impossible if God is supremely *One*. If *He* were in motion, *He* would be moving either in place or undergoing alteration. If the former was true, then God would have a center around which its parts would be moving, while if the latter was true, then *He* would change into something other than *Himself*. Since God, as previously shown, cannot be in the same place, it follows that *He* can be neither at rest nor in motion. Consequently, God is not the same as *Himself* nor is *He* the same as another for sameness is different from God and in predicating sameness of God, *He* would become both, *One* and not *One*. In the latter case, *He* would become different from *Himself*. If *He* would be other than *Himself* or other than another that would imply multiplicity, which was previously stated. Consequently, God can be neither like nor unlike *Himself*. The same applies to God being like or unlike another. Furthermore, God cannot be either equal or unequal to *Himself* or to another, since being equal means having the same measures as anything to which one may be equal. Since God does not have likeness, equality, or sameness, *He* cannot be younger, older, or of the same age as *Himself* or as another. And thus, God cannot participate in time by any means. If God does not participate in time, *He* never was, nor can one say *He* has become or is becoming or is, or that *He* will be in the future. Since all *beings* participate in time, it can only follow that God, spoken of in the highest sense, cannot be coordinate with *Being*, given that, the conclusions are true. Ultimately, it follows that God is neither the *One* nor *One* nor that *He* is or is not in any way like the *One*.<sup>7</sup>

We have examined the character of the Platonic *One* and the Christian God, in the sense of being purely one and different, therefore we will now strictly explore the Thomistic theological framework of God. In the *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas says: “Now, because we cannot know what God is, but rather what *He* is not, we have no means for considering how God is, but rather how *He* is not”.<sup>8</sup> Here, God is denied *Being* in a transcendental way. When using the word “is”, St. Thomas refers to the knowledge of God, which

<sup>5</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (California: Coyote Canyon Press, 2018), I, Q. 11, Art. 4, p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> Plato, *Parmenides*, trans. F. M. Cornford (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973), 137c.

<sup>7</sup> All negations are displayed in the same order Plato explored them; Plato, *Parmenides*, trans. F. M. Cornford (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973), 137c - 142a.

<sup>8</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (California: Coyote Canyon Press, 2018), I, Q. 3 Art. 1, p. 31.

is unattainable through any sort of affirmative reasoning process. Elsewhere, he says there is no name that can be attributed to God, not even the name “God”. According to St. Thomas, a name is communicable either by similitude or properly. By similitude, a name is attributed to things that are part of the signification of the name in question such as “biped” and “rational”, which participate in the nature of humankind. The latter sense is used when giving one name to many belonging to the same species; the same way the word “humankind” is predicated of all *beings* which are of this same nature, and thus, names are never given particularly but universally. St. Thomas finds neither of these ways suitable for the cause of all *beings*. He reaches the conclusion that the name “God” is communicable only by means of opinion, and not in reality, given the ontological distinction between the two.<sup>9</sup> This conclusion is worth noted for the means of communicating “God” by ‘opinion’ unlike reality. Yet, “God” is beyond *Being*, as constituting its source and no name or opinion can be attributed to *Him* who is the source of all things. Moreover, St. Thomas Aquinas utilizes a negative dialectic to reach God, as influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius: “For this would be really to see and to know: to praise the Transcendent *One* in a transcending way, namely through the denial of all beings.”<sup>10</sup>

The next question will explore what the purpose of the negations is and the role they play in the attaining of the fullest and highest vision the created intellect has the capacity for. In order to answer the proposed inquiry, in discussing the cloud of unknowing, Pseudo-Dionysius says: “Here, renouncing all that the mind may conceive, wrapped entirely in the intangible and the invisible, he belongs completely to him who is beyond everything. Here being neither oneself nor someone else, one is supremely united to the completely unknown by an inactivity of all knowledge and knows beyond the mind by knowing nothing.”<sup>11</sup> According to the ineffable nature of God, the mind may leave all knowing and unknowing in order to attain the highest vision capable for humankind. This divine ascent is actualized through the purification of the images one may have of God. This is a hierarchical ascent from the lowest and closest to the visible realm, such as shapes and magnitudes, to the divine realm such as to Spirit, and the Good. Also, since God is present in all things by means of power, presence, and *essence*,<sup>12</sup> these images exist everywhere, as taking both corporeal and incorporeal forms. As approaching this most beautiful vision of *Him*, the images or predicates one may have of God ought to diminish in number until reaching that divine darkness where *He* dwells; concealed from all the light among *beings*. Similarly, St. Thomas accepts this view: “God is called incomprehensible not because anything of *Him* is not seen; but because *He* is not seen as perfectly as *He* is capable of being seen; thus when any demonstrable proposition is known by probable reason only, it does not follow that any part of it is unknown, either the subject, or the predicate, or the composition; but that it is not as perfectly known as it is capable of being known.”<sup>13</sup> To him, one may also have such a vision as the one described by Pseudo-Dionysius, since it is remote from all demonstrable propositions, reason and does not constitute knowledge of God, but only the highest vision of *Him* accessible to humankind. This does not refute, by any means, the incomprehensibility of

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, I, Q.13, Art. 9, p. 55.

<sup>10</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *Mystical Theology*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 1025B.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1001A.

<sup>12</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (California: Coyote Canyon Press, 2018), I, Q. 8, Art. 1, p. 41.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, I, Q. 12, Art. 7, p. 49.

God. For this vision cannot be denominated as knowledge, for the reasons mentioned above. The experience described by Pseudo-Dionysius is reminiscent of Proclus and can be seen in the *Parmenides* through the series of negations, including of all images, thus ascending from *Being* to the inexpressible *itself*.<sup>14</sup>

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

Pseudo-Dionysius' reach is concisely summarized by Ronald F. Hathaway: "It is sufficient to name John of Damascus, John Scotus Eriugena, Richard and Hugh of St. Victor, Thomas Aquinas, Nicolas of Cusa, Eckhart, Robert Grosseteste, Dante, and Marsilio Ficino to sense the breadth of his [Pseudo-Dionysius] direct influence on medieval thought."<sup>15</sup> Hathaway goes further in stating that Pseudo-Dionysius' "hierarchic theory has ramifications pertinent not only to modern and medieval ecclesiastical history and theology, but also to the history of philosophy as a whole."<sup>16</sup>

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

### The Distinction

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

Before diving into this inquiry, the distinction between the *One*/God beyond *Being* and the *One*/God coordinate with *Being* must be clarified. In his *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, Proclus brings forth this same issue by saying: "For he (Plato) knows that *One* has two meanings-- in one sense it transcends, in the other it is coordinate with, *is*. In the latter sense, it is in a way comparable to existence as participating and being participated in by it. But in the former, it is incomparable and imparticipable by everything."<sup>17</sup> Since the *One* which *is*, means that it is coordinate with *Being*, is in a way comparable to existence, predicates such as magnitude, shape, limit, time, motion, rest and all the other attributes -negated in the first section- can now be both asserted and negated of *He* who *is*, in such a way, that affirmative conclusions can be reached about that through which all *beings* exist. This is the subject matter which serves as the conceptual framework of this section and is expounded in the second hypothesis. Comparably, St. Thomas makes

<sup>14</sup> Proclus, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), VII, 76K.

<sup>15</sup> Ronald F. Hathaway, *Hierarchy and the Definition of Order in the Letters of Pseudo-Dionysius* (Massachusetts: Brandeis University, 1969), I, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, I, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Proclus, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), VII, 34ff.

a similar distinction in the following passage: “This name *HE WHO IS* is the name of God more properly than this name ‘God,’ as regards its source, namely, existence; and as regards the mode of signification and consignification, as said above.”<sup>18</sup> Consequently, he differentiates the name “God” as incommunicable from its lower counterpart bound with *Being*; which is a more proper appellation inasmuch as all things exist through “*He who is*”. This can also be understood as the signification of the latter denomination in the Thomistic sense. Furthermore, the consignification of the name “*He who is*” simply refers to its universality, namely the boundless nature of all things participating in God’s *essence*. And thus, this finding will allow the possibility of positively inquiring about the “Source and end of all things.”<sup>19</sup>

### The Thomistic Theological Framework of God

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

St. Thomas describes God as the first mover, immovable, eternal, needing to be, existing always, immutable, as having no beginning, no end, existing simultaneously, simple, not a composite, free from all contrariety, being his own *essence*,<sup>20</sup> pure act, one, infinite quantity, power, as embracing all beings, and as supreme perfection. He continues by asserting that all perfection found in things preexists in *Him* abundantly and that all perfections are one in God. Additionally, being, power, action, and other similar attributes pertain to perfection and are identical with *His essence*. There is neither definition of nor *form* and *matter* in *Him*, thus being the cause of all intellectuality. Neither succession nor discursive reasoning are in God’s understanding. What *He* understands and that which is understood is identical with *His essence*, and everything is comprehended in *His* intellect by a single act of intuition. God loves everything by a single act of *His Will* and does not presuppose matter in *His* activity. *He* brought all things into existence, and nothing is coeternal with *Him*. *He* is the first truth from which all other truths have their certitude, moves things in a way that is consonant with their nature, helps humankind by an increase of light, communicates existence to all things just as the sun emanates light, is the cause of the continuation of existence in things, is in all things by *essence*, power and presence, and arranges and orders through the means of intermediate causes.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (California: Coyote Canyon Press, 2018), I, Q. 13, Art. 11, p. 56.

<sup>19</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, trans. Colm Luibheid and Paul Rorem (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 825B.

<sup>20</sup> *Essence* (*οὐσία*) is defined by Aristotle (*Metaphysics*; Zeta 1035b) as the *form* of a composite, as soul is to humankind. *Essence* in Aristotle has the property of *kinesis* similar to how the soul is said to operate, being as it is, that towards which it moves, its own final cause. (*κίνησις* = locomotion, alteration, decay, growth) (Aristotle; *De Anima* I.3 406a). All of the powers of the soul are said to be *movements* in this sense. Additionally, *essence*, as attributed to God by St. Thomas, is superior to all other *essences*, to such an extent that all the other *essences* emerge from *Him* and return to *Him*.

<sup>21</sup> All the attributes come from the *Summa of the Summa Theologica*. The page numbers according to each of the predicates mentioned in the order in which they were illustrated goes as follows (two or more attributes may appear on the same page): 9, 10, 11 (two), 12 (three),



### The Limited/Unlimited

The following discussion will explore this pair of opposites as present in the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides* by using Proclus' *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* as the foundation for all the explanation that is to follow. This investigation aims at showing the implications of the dialectical exploration of the *One* as seen in the Platonic text, later brought to a close relation with St. Thomas' conceptual framework of God, through as many Thomistic attributes of God as possible.<sup>22</sup>

In the *Parmenides*, one of the conclusions reached in the first hypothesis is that “the end and the beginning are the limits of each thing.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, “the *One* is unlimited, if it has neither beginning nor end.”<sup>24</sup> Regarding this issue Proclus discerns that in the second hypothesis, and in the interests of establishing the triad of beginning, middle, and end, Plato brings the *Limited* and the *Unlimited* in relationship to the *One*. In this sense, it is said to be resting where it *is*, proceeding forth and returning to itself while holding together its “peak of superiority” (*κατ'ἄκρην υπερβολήν*).<sup>25</sup> *Ousia* (*οὐσίᾳ*) in Plato, is a turning about itself, unlike Aristotle's explicit notion, and can also be seen as the *One*'s intellection, existence, and generative properties. This notion is also partially grasped in St. Thomas Aquinas' proposition in that there is neither discursive reasoning, nor multiplicity in God and that the mind of God is identical with *His essence* (also the common translation of “*οὐσίᾳ*”).

Proclus continues the inquiry about the *Limited* and the *Unlimited* with the different ways in which unlimitedness applies to the *One* coordinate with *Being*. Namely, it is unlimited in this way, that it is incomprehensible and unencompassable while also being the limit of everything that has existence without imposing any limit on itself. Another understanding of the *One*'s unlimitedness is infinite power, along with the causal interpretation of this attribute, for all things are generated by it, and that all the unlimitedness immanent in the visible world is caused by the *One* which *is*. Furthermore, the *Unlimited* may be spoken of as Eternity itself which is most appropriately accordant with the *One*/God, as denoting both its comprehension and causation of the whole infinity of the intelligible realm. Additionally, it is called the “fountain of all infinity (*τὴν πρωτιστην πηγὴν αὐτὴν*) — intelligible, intellectual, psychic (pertaining to the soul), corporeal, or material.”<sup>26</sup> The *One* also arranges and orders all things through intermediate causes, as the secondary classes of *beings* depend on the ones prior to them, for “the mean is to the first term as the last term is to the mean.”<sup>27</sup> This describes the analogy: *noesis* is to *dianoia* as *pistis* is to *eikasia*. Ultimately, material generation is held together through eternal generation which participates in the *Unlimited*.

The discussion will now turn to examine the “chain of Limit” (*τὴν σειράν τοῦ πέρατος*).<sup>28</sup> The primary way in which this is predicated of the *One* is as

13, 14 (two), 15 (two), 16, 18, 21, 22 (two), 23 (two), 24, 25, 27, 29, 30, 31, 51 (two), 64, 100, 107, 145 (two), 143, 146 (two), 152, 167.

<sup>22</sup> Both the structure and the interpretations explored in the following discussion illustrate an abbreviated form of Proclus' exploration of the *Limited* and the *Unlimited* in Book VI of his *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, 1116 - 1124.

<sup>23</sup> Plato, *Parmenides*, trans. F. M. Cornford (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973), 137d.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Proclus, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), VI, 1116ff.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 1120ff.

<sup>27</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973), 32a.

<sup>28</sup> Proclus, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), VI, 1121ff.



the “fount and foundation of all limits, intelligible, intellectual, supracosmic, encosmic, preexistent itself as the measure and bound of all things.”<sup>29</sup> The second limit attributed to it is *Eternity*, since it is both limited and unlimited by virtue of being the “measure of all intellectual activity and the bound of the life of the intellect.”<sup>30</sup> The *One* is also static, immovable and immutable by virtue of remaining in and turning upon itself, thus bounded and limited, being the first principle of all motion.<sup>31</sup> Since it becomes neither more nor less than itself, it has been said to be limited, along with causing Time which is both the measure and the limit of all things. The *form* in *matter* can be seen also as caused by limit, since humankind is confined to the characteristics and properties belonging to its species. The *One* which *is*, is also pure actuality in the sense that it is the object of desire of all things. These, in turn, have existence and power in accordance with their respective nature, denoting limit.

Gregory Shaw observes: “Mediating opposites was the soul’s only way to enter the hidden activity of the *One* which, according to Iamblichus, was an entirely ineffable principle ‘known’ only through the mixing of its equally unknowable derivatives: the Limit and the Unlimited, from which all number and existence derive.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, it is through the mediation of opposites such as sameness/difference, rest/motion, limited/unlimited that the soul trains its vision to the *One*. The exploration of divinity by means of opposites is a method that seems to be employed upon by both Plato and Aristotle and it is empiricism that separates the latter from the former in expressing this spiritual exercise. According to Iamblichus, however, in animating the body, the soul shares in mortality and its *essence* (*οὐσία*) becomes fragmented into *essences* (*οὐσίαι*), and thus its *ousia* is both “one and many”<sup>33</sup>. And it is through the contemplation of opposites, reflecting upon the soul’s nature as intermediate between the immortality of gods and the mortality of generated *beings*, that it becomes a *container* for receiving the gods. Plato reiterates this same idea in the *Timaeus*, where he expounds on the nature of the soul: “[...] indivisible and unchangeable, and from that kind of being which is distributed among bodies, he compounded a third and intermediate kind of being.”<sup>34</sup>

The current inquiry has now explored the various classes of both the *Limited* and the *Unlimited*, and the specific character and function that each of the two possesses in relation to the *One* which *is* and to the soul’s means to ascent.

### Faith and Reason

St. Thomas Aquinas’ emphasizes the primacy of *faith* over reason, the converse being true of Platonism. St. Thomas’ view of *faith* may be seen from the following passage: “Although those things which are beyond man’s knowledge may not be sought for by man through his reason, nevertheless, once they are revealed by God, they must be accepted by faith.”<sup>35</sup> There are many other passages in the *Summa Theologica* evincing the same idea of the

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., VI, 1121ff.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., VI, 1122ff.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., VI, 1122ff.

<sup>32</sup> Gregory Shaw, *Archetypal Psychology, Dreamwork, and Neoplatonism* (Massachusetts: Stonehill College, 2016), I, p. 332.

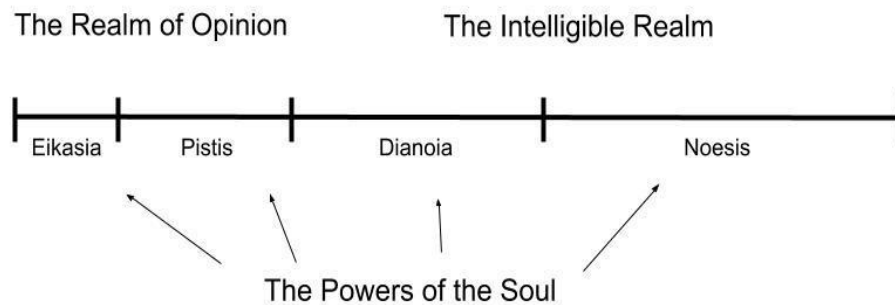
<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973), 34c-35a.

<sup>35</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (California: Coyote Canyon Press, 2018), I, Q. 1, Art. 1, p. 27.

supremacy of *faith* over reason, in terms of knowledge of the divine. To St. Thomas, *faith* is above reason in the sense that it has a greater capacity for “super intellectual knowledge of God”<sup>36</sup>. The summarized argument goes as follows: since intellect exercises understanding by means of likeness and discursive reasoning, the highest vision of that which is beyond all knowing may be brought about by *faith*, inasmuch as it is removed from the bounds of reason.<sup>37</sup>

## The Divided Line



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

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

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

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

<sup>1,2</sup> Proclus; *Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*; Book V 985.9 -986.18.

On the other hand, Plato, as seen from the model in the *Republic*, places *faith* third in rank from the highest function of the soul, intellect.<sup>38</sup> Both Plato and Pseudo-Dionysius consider that the means to ascend towards the transcendent *One* is through the negation of all *beings*, departing from all knowledge, opinion, belief and images, as previously discussed. A reference to belief is made in the *Parmenides*: “but it seems that the *One* neither is one nor exists at all if one is to *believe* such an argument”<sup>39</sup>. Proclus declares *faith* as “binding and uniting us to the *One*”<sup>40</sup> however, only by means of it being united with the rest of the soul’s cognitive functions.

While both Plato and St. Thomas Aquinas establish that the intellect alone may see the divine *essence*, they differ in respect to the most

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 359.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., Both the citation and the argument come from St. Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa of the Summa Theologica*

<sup>38</sup> The diagram and the definitions have as basis the description given in Plato’s *Republic*, Book VI, 509d-511e.

<sup>39</sup> Plato, *Parmenides*, trans. Juan F. Balboa (San Jacinto: Lulu Books, 2006), 141e, p. 32, Proclus, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), VII, 42K.

<sup>40</sup> Proclus, *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides*, trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), VII, 42K.

appropriate means of attaining this vision. The latter postulates *faith* as the luminous guide of the created intellect, while the former designates the *Logos*, the *dianoetic* powers of the soul, as being most cathartic and enlightening.

### Conclusion

We can see traces and projections of Platonism and Neoplatonism in the foundation of Christian theology. Accordingly, St. Thomas Aquinas attempts to utilize an ascent to Platonism through the influence of Aristotle and Pseudo-Dionysius. While the discordance on *faith* has a significant impact on differentiating Plato from St. Thomas Aquinas, there are various other matters that relate the two thinkers. As shown above, Plato's *Parmenides* had indirectly impacted the Thomistic framework of "God" as displayed in the *Summa Theologica*, to the extent that the *One* and the Christian God have a share in identities and functions. Furthermore, Aristotle's method and demonstrative precision also appear to have shaped St. Thomas Aquinas' theology. For, the structure of the *Summa Theologica* mirrors Aristotle's strict and successive style of writing. Lastly, the profound nature of this inquiry deserves further investigation and scholarly consideration, including whether the Platonic tradition is or is not reconcilable with Christian theology.<sup>41</sup>

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