

THOMAS AQUINAS AND THALES OF MILETUS'S STATEMENT 'OMNIA ESSE PLENA DIIS'

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Abstract: Thomas Aquinas binds Thales of Miletus's sentence "*omnia esse plena diis*" to the concept of *anima mundi* and to the religious practice of idolatry, laying down a criticism to the reputed thought of the philosopher from Miletus. This article analyses, on the one hand, the assumptions of such link and, on the other hand, the philosophical reasonableness of Aquinas's proceedings. In order to do so, I shall argue that Aquinas's criticism is set from the perspective of a Christian metaphysics, which attaches personality and transcendentality to the notion of God. In this sense, I demonstrate that, within Aquinas's Christian metaphysics, both the concept of *anima mundi* and the religious practice of idolatry are inconsistent, entitled to be regarded as a detour from natural reason.

Keywords: Natural reason, divinity, metaphysics, soul.

Resumo: Tomás de Aquino vincula a sentença de Tales de Mileto "*omnia esse plena diis*" com o conceito de *anima mundi* e com a prática religiosa da idolatria, estabelecendo uma crítica ao suposto pensamento do filósofo de Mileto. Este artigo analisa, por um lado, os pressupostos de tal vinculação e, por outro lado, a razoabilidade filosófica do procedimento de Tomás. Para tanto, argumento que a crítica do doutor angélico é feita à luz da metafísica cristã, esta que atribui personalidade e transcendentalidade à noção de Deus. Nesse sentido, mostro que, pela perspectiva da metafísica cristã de Tomás, tanto o conceito de *anima mundi* como a prática religiosa da idolatria são inconsistentes, se configurando como um desvio da razão natural.

Palavras-chave: Razão natural, divindade, metafísica, alma.

Brief initial comments

Metaphysical, cosmological and religious notions are articulated in Thomas Aquinas's discussion on Thales of Miletus's philosophy of nature, mainly when he binds the sentence "*omnia esse plena diis*", assigned to Thales, to the concept of *anima mundi* and the religious notion of idolatry.¹ The author

¹ Latin texts of Aquinas are cited according to the *Editio Leonina*, with the following abbreviations: *In Phys.* (*Commentaria in octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis*; *In De caelo* (*Commentaria in libros Aristotelis De caelo et mundo*); *ST* (*Summae Theologiae*); *SCG* (*Summa contra Gentiles*); *DSS* (*De substantiis separatis ad fratrem Raynaldum de Piperno*); *CICR* (*Contra Impugnantes Dei Cultum et Religionem*); *De ente* (*De ente et essentia*); *DON* (*De operationibus occultis naturae*); *De malo* (*Quaestiones disputatae*

himself is aware that the discussion is transdisciplinary: he employs the expression *anima mundi* in works which are, to some extent, (i) strictly philosophical,² (ii) strictly theological,³ and ‘mixed’ (theologic-philosophical).⁴

The diverse meanings of the expression *anima mundi*, as they are appointed in Aquinas’s texts and are criticised by him, are based on the notion of formal principle: as it shapes the heterogeneous parts of the body of the whole, the *anima mundi* grants the whole the character of cosmos, i.e. a harmonious, united, and beautiful totality, which is similar to the soul of a living being that, by keeping its distinct parts working perfectly, keeps the being alive in existence. Besides, the concept of *anima mundi*, according to Aquinas, was employed to provide a reasoned justification to idolatry, the divine worship addressed to someone or something other than the ‘God’ revealed and preached by the three Book religions whose patriarch is Abraham: Judaism, Christianity and Islam.⁵ Therefore, Aquinas engages a lengthy argumentative effort in order to refute, on the one hand, a hypothetical philosophical consistency of the notion of *anima mundi* and, on the other hand, the identity between the *anima mundi* and God.

de malo); *In De anima* (*Sentencia libri De anima*); *De Trin.* (*Super Boetium De Trinitate*). Other editions used: *In Sent.* (*Scriptum super libros sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi*); *De pot.* (*Quaestiones disputatae de potentia Dei*); *In Metaph.* (*In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum Aristoteli expositio*); *Super lo.* (*Super Ioannem. Super evangelium s. Ioannis lectura*); *Cat. Aurea* (*Catena aurea in quatuor Evangelia*). The citations in the body of the text belong to the following editions: *Commentary on Aristotle’s De anima* (1951); *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith: Summa contra Gentiles* (1955–57); *Summa Theologiae* (1981).

² Cf. *De pot.*, q. 6, a. 6, c; *In De anima* I, 5, 8§; *In De anima* I, 13, 1§; *In De caelo* II, 1, n. 10.

³ Cf. *Cat. aurea in lo.*, c. 1, l. 3; *Super lo.*, c. 17, l. 6.

⁴ SCG I, c. 27; SCG III, c. 120; SCG IV, c. 6; SCG IV, c. 55; *De Trin.*, q. 1, a. 4, ad8; *De Trin.*, q. 3, a. 4, c 1; *ST I*, q. 3, a. 8, c; *ST I*, q. 51, a. 1, ad1; *ST I*, q. 90, a. 1; a. 4; *ST II-II*, q. 94, a. 1, c; *ST III*, q. 6, a. 3; *De malo*, q. 16, a. 1, c.

⁵ It is known that Aquinas sincerely revered Maimonides, whom he refers as ‘*Rabi Moyses*’, a Jewish master and philosopher. See, among other texts: *In Sent.*, I, d. 2, q. 1, a. 3; *In Sent.*, II, d. 3, q. 1, a. 3 (here Aquinas refers to *Rabbi Moyses* as “philosopher”); SCG II, 92; SCG III, 97; *ST I*, q. 50, a. 3 (here Aquinas refers to *Rabbi Moyses* as “Jewish”); *ST II-II*, q. 185, a. 1. In spite of critical philosophical issues and the rough tone used sometimes, Aquinas also recognizes the merits of Averroes, an Islamic. Among the texts by Averroes which Aquinas relies on, there is one in which there is an articulation of the notions of *anima mundi* and idolatry, SCG I, 27, 8§: “*Commentator etiam dicit, in XI Metaphys., quod hic locus fuit lapsus sapientum gentis Zabiorum, idest idolatrarum: quia scilicet posuerunt Deum esse formam caeli*”. The discussion on the proposition “God is the *anima mundi*”, within the quote by Averroes used by Aquinas, would also exist within the Islamic context during the lifetime of Averroes and would be opposed by the Islamic philosopher. It is really significant that Aquinas concludes the SCG I, 27, refuting the aforementioned proposition and the idolatry by relying on Averroes’s words.

I. The emergence of idolatry and the *aetatis mundi*

In Aquinas's works, there is explicit interest not only in the history of philosophy,⁶ but also in the history of natural religion and, within both domains, there is also a micro-history of the idea of *anima mundi* and Thales, at least hypothetically, would have been the first to throw light on it, as it is attested in the curious introduction of the term 'idolatry' in *In De anima* I, 13, 1§. In fact, to introduce a strictly religious notion in a work which is commentary on an aristotelian text is not trivial. In order to understand such a discussion, one is to inquire how Aquinas links the history of philosophy to the history of natural religion. Besides, if the micro-history of the idea of *anima mundi* is alternatively subsumed in the history of philosophy and in the history of natural religion, the notion of idolatry should be understood through the link between these two domains in the *In De anima* I, 13, 1§.

The history of natural religion is not to be found in a systematic fashion within Aquinas's works for it is always addressed as subordinate to some more general discussion such as, for example, the definition of religion, which is approached by Aquinas in the following texts: *In Sent.*, III, d. 9, q. 1, a. 1; d. 33, q. 3, a. 4 (1254-1256); *CICR*, c. 1 (1256); *De Trin.*, q. 3 (1257-1258); *SCG* III, cc. 119-120 (1261-1264); *ST* II-II, qq. 81-100 (1271-1272). The reading of this group of texts does not reveal any shift regarding the account on the nature of religion. In this context, it is worth note that the arguments in *ST* II-II, qq. 81-100 are more extensive, which is the reason why the author calls it a (*tractatus*) "*De religione*". For the purposes of this study, the arguments from *SCG* III, c. 120 and from *ST* II-II, q. 94, named "*De idolatria*" are remarkable for they are the texts in which Aquinas explicitly binds the notion of *anima mundi* to the religious practice of idolatry.

A compared reading of the *SCG* III, c. 120 and the *ST* II-II, q. 94, allows us to realize that there is, in the later, a subject linked to the notions of religion and idolatry which is not to be found in the *SCG* III, c. 120: the history of the cosmos, the universal history, the *aetatis mundi*, in Aquinas's terminology. Moreover, the ages of the cosmos are listed from the emergence of the human being on the Earth. It is also worth note that the approach to the history of the cosmos which is only rehearsed in the *ST* II-II, q. 94, finds its immediate complement in a previous text: *In Sent.*, IV, d. 40, q. 1, a. 4. In this text, the author holds that the nature of the cosmos itself, its *substantia*, is ageless: the being of cosmos, once it is generated, and for what it is generated, should last forever. Consequently, the expression "*aetatis mundi*", should not

⁶ See, for example: *SCG* II, c. 37; *De pot.*, q. 3, a. 5; *ST* I, q. 44, a. 2; *In Phys.*, VIII, 2; *DSS*, c. 9.

refer to the notion of substance, but to the notion of status. Thus, time passes for the status of the cosmos, not to its substance.⁷

The ages of the cosmos are thought out of the analogy to the medieval conception of the ages of human life: (i) the infancy, which goes from the birth until seven years of age; (ii) the child, until fourteen years of age; (iii) adolescence, until the twenty-five years of age; (iv) youth, until fifty years of age; (v) old, until the seventy years of age; (vi) from old to death. Analogously, according to *In Sent.*, IV, d. 40, q. 1, a. 4, the cosmos has passed by five ages, according to the Sacred Scripture, with only the end of the sixth, and last, remaining, which should be the great scatology in the second coming of Christ to Earth.⁸ Here are the cosmic ages, as in the Sacred Scripture, according to Aquinas: (i) from Adam to Noah; (ii) from Noah to Abraham, including the deluge; (iii) from Abraham to the king David; (iv) from David to the Babylonian captivity; (v) from the Babylonian exile to the birth of Christ; (vi) from the resurrection of Christ to the great scatology.

According to the history of the cosmos, idolatry emerged in the second cosmic age. In this regard, the objection and response found in the *ST II-II*, q. 94, a. 4, (obj. 2 and ad2) are very interesting. The objection says:

Further, those things which have a cause in man are found among men at all times. Now idolatry was not always, but is stated to have been originated either by Nimrod, who is related to have forced men to worship fire, or by Ninus, who caused the statue of his father Bel to be worshiped. Among the Greeks, as related by Isidore, Prometheus was the first to set up statues of men: and the Jews say that Ismael was the first to make idols of clay. Moreover, idolatry ceased to a great extent in the sixth age. Therefore idolatry had no cause on the part of man.⁹

⁷ (*In Sent.*, IV, d. 40, q. 1, a. 4, *expositio textus*): "Mundo non assignantur aetates quantum ad substantiam, quia sic in perpetuum durabit; sed quantum ad statum; sic enim transibit mundus, et sic antiquatur et senescit".

⁸ On the great scatology in Aquinas, see: TE VELDE, 2002; VALLS, 2014.

⁹ (*ST II-II*, q. 94, a. 4, obj. 2): "Ea quae ex parte hominis causantur, omni tempore in hominibus inveniuntur. Non autem semper fuit idololatria, sed in secunda aetate legitur esse adinventā, vel a Nemrod, qui, ut dicitur, cogebat homines ignem adorare; vel a Nino, qui imaginem patris sui Beli adorari fecit. Apud Graecos autem, ut Isidorus refert, *Prometheus primus simulacra hominum de luto finxit. Iudaei vero dicunt quod Ismael primus simulacra de luto fecit*. Cessavit etiam in sexta aetate idololatria ex magna parte. Ergo idololatria non habuit causam ex parte hominis".

Aquinas, in his response, writes:

There was no idolatry in the first age, owing to the recent remembrance of the creation of the world, so that man still retained in his mind the knowledge of one God. In the sixth age idolatry was banished by the doctrine and power of Christ, who triumphed over the devil.¹⁰

All events and characters mentioned by Aquinas in the *ST II-II*, q. 94, a.4, are prior to the birth of philosophy in Greece and to Thales, the first natural philosopher, for the emergence of philosophy and Thales date back to the fourth and fifth cosmical ages while idolatry appeared in the second age, as Aquinas drew from Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica*.¹¹ The invention of idolatry may belong to the domain of sacred history, be it with Nimrod or with Ismael, to the history of Assyria with Ninus, or even to the history of Greece with Prometheus.

The source on Nimrod is the Scripture (Gn. 10, 8 ss; 1 Cr1, 10), for he is a biblical character, introduced as Ham's grandson and one of Noah's three children. The source on Ninus, in its turn, is *De Civitate Dei*, in which Ninus is presented as the second king of Assyria, successor of his father, the king Bel. Ninus, according to Augustine, had already ruled for forty-three years and Abraham was born, i.e., a thousand two hundred years before the foundation of Rome.¹² The source on Ismael is also the Scripture (Gn. 16, 1-16; Gn 25, 12-18): he is Abraham's son. Finally, there is a reference to Prometheus, not that from Greek mythology, but to a supposed Greek man who, according to Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae*,¹³ made statues of clay to be worshiped.

Aquinas is certain that, historically, idolatry emerged in the second cosmic age and that the causes of such an emergence may be said in two means: natural and supernatural.¹⁴ In the first mode, the cause is about human dispositions, regarded in three perspectives: (i) affection, (ii) imagination, (iii) ignorance. Concerning the first perspective, Aquinas states that the cause of idolatry is affection disorder. He mentions the exaggerated love for relatives

¹⁰ (*ST II-II*, q. 94, a. 4, ad2): "Ad secundum dicendum quod in prima aetate non fuit idololatria propter recentem memoriam creationis mundi, ex qua adhuc vigeat cognitio unius Dei in mente hominum. In sexta autem aetate idololatria est exclusa per doctrinam et virtutem Christi, qui de diabolo triumphavit".

¹¹ According to the *Editio Leonina* of the *ST II-II*, q. 94, a. 4, (obj. 2), p. 310.

¹² Cf. AUGUSTINUS. *De Civitate Dei*, c. 18, n. 2.2; c. 18, n. 21.

¹³ Cf. ISIDORE OF SEVILLE. *Etimologia VIII*, 21.

¹⁴ In this study, I shall not address the supernatural cause of idolatry, the demons. Among other texts, see: *ST II-II*, q. 94, a. 4, c: "Alia autem causa idololatriae fuit consummativa, ex parte daemonum, qui se colendos hominibus errantibus exhibuerunt in idolis, dando responsa et aliqua quae videbantur hominibus mirabilia faciendo. Unde et in *Psalm*. dicitur: *Omnes dii gentium daemonia*".

and the veneration of rulers. Concerning the former, Aquinas cites the example of a father who loses a son, which may have motivated the making of a sculpture that, being excessively valued, may have led to divinization of the dead. In the second case, the excessive veneration of the rulers may have led servants to carve on wood and stone the regent's image. The veneration to the ruler's image would have occurred with such intensity that each worshiper would have saved some words to the image, words that should not be pronounced among the worshipers, a practice which not only grants the image with a certain mystery, but also divinizes it.¹⁵

It is of human nature the delight with fantasies from imagination. However, Aquinas asserts, the man who misses some rational maturity due to the lack of intellectual guidance¹⁶ is likely to idolize the beauty of the art printed by artisans in well ornated sculptures. As he admires the sculpture and delights itself with its memory, the uneducated man might be led to worship that sculpture as well as spread this practice.¹⁷ In this context, it also worth noticing that the lack of intellectual guidance is something link both to the human species and to the individual. It means that each generation should, on the one hand, deepen the knowledge they acquired continuously and, on the other hand, struggle to keep and forward thier knowledge to the following generation. If it does not happen, mankind should return to ignorance which, as Aquinas sees it, confines men to realities naturally inferior to its proper intellectual nature.

The third perspective concerning the natural cause of idolatry is precisely linked to the notion of ignorance. According to the aforementioned quote, there was no idolatry in the frist cosmic age due to the "(...) recent remembrance of the creation of the world, so that man still retained in his mind the knowledge of one God". Back in the first cosmic age, besides individual memory, there was collective memory which, constantly employed, made it unfeasible that the human mind would ignore the existence of one only God as the creator. Nevertheless, ignorance towards the one only God creator could be found in the second cosmic age, two generations after Noah, in Nimrod, his great grandson.

It should be noted that, for Aquinas, human memory, both individual and collective, if not suitably employed, decays easily and decays even towards extremely important matters, such as the memory of one only God as the

¹⁵ See: *ST II-II*, q. 94, a. 4, c.

¹⁶ *ST II-II*, q. 94, a. 4, c.: "homines rudes a principio".

¹⁷ See: *ST II-II*, q. 94, a. 4, c.

creator. The emergence of idolatry is related to the absence of memory and to the ignorance towards God:

Thirdly, on account of their ignorance of the true God, inasmuch as through failing to consider His excellence men gave divine worship to certain creatures, on account of their beauty or power, wherefore it is written (Wis. 13:1,2): 'All men... neither by attending to the works have acknowledged who was the workman, but have imagined either the fire, or the wind, or the swift air, or the circle of the stars, or the great water, or the sun and the moon, to be the gods that rule the world'.¹⁸

Achieving the knowledge of the immateriality and the spirituality of the divinity does not suffice to human mind. For it must recognize, besides the singular unity of God – i.e. that there is only one God – the personality of God and, consequently, the relational character of God to the human mind and to every human being. Therefore, there should be some dialogue between the *intellectus divinus*, which is person, and the human person who has the *mens* as one of its constituents.

Before approaching the cosmological aspects of the quote above, we could inquire: for Aquinas, would the human *mens* as natural reason, without divine aid, achieve the knowledge of God *personalis* in such a fashion that the man would establish a relation of worship with Him as worshipping is conceived by the Christianity? It seems that, as Aquinas sees it, even at the apex of his philosophical maturity, the human natural reason keeps limited and therefore requires the divine revelation to be informed about the God *personalis*.¹⁹ Indeed, Aquinas is well aware that, from Thales to Plotinus, there are numerous examples of the philosophical notion of god in non-Christian

¹⁸ (ST II-II, q. 94, a. 4, c): "Tertio, propter ignorantiam veri Dei: cuius excellentiam homines non considerantes, quibusdam creaturis, propter pulchritudinem seu virtutem, divinitatis cultum exhibuerunt. Unde dicitur Sap. XIII: *Neque, operibus attendentes, agnoverunt quis esset artifex. Sed aut ignem, aut spiritum, aut citatum aërem, aut gyrum stellarum, aut nimiam aquam, aut solem, aut lunam, rectores orbis terrarum, deos putaverunt*".

¹⁹ The topic of the limits of philosophy for Aquinas is consistently explored by Jan A. Aertsen. See, among others: AERTSEN, 1991; AERTSEN, 1996a. It is also worth observing that the notion of a God *personalis* in Aquinas seems to be linked to the book of *Exodus*, something Étienne Gilson and Joseph Owens name "metaphysics of *Exodus*". For Étienne Gilson, see: GILSON, 1940; GILSON, 1948; GILSON, 1986; 1993. Joseph Owens problematizes the possible relation between the metaphysics of *Exodus* and the Aristotelian philosophy in Aquinas works. See, among others: OWENS, 1951; OWENS, 1966; OWENS, 1980. On the relation between Aquinas's Christian metaphysics and Greek philosophy, including Aristotelian philosophy, from a perspective similar to the one found in Gilson, see: PEGIS, 1939; PEGIS, 1964. Concerning Aquinas's Christian metaphysics's debts to both Jewish and Islamic philosophers, see: ELDEERS, 2015; and also: BROCK, 2015.

philosophies.²⁰ None of those philosophers display themselves as followers of a personified inner voice, as it could be vouched in Christian Augustine's testimonial. In fact, in *ST II-II*, q. 94, a. 2 (c), Aquinas quotes Augustine stating that "(...) we must not seek religion from the philosophers (...)"²¹ It is certain that "seek" (*quaerere*) in the context of *ST II-II*, q. 94, a. 2 (c) means something like "follow", look for "practical" advice and also look for rational enlightenment in order to live better religious life in the sense of "follow" the only creator God, the God *personalis*. Although the immediate reference to *quaerere* is Senecan, one can be quite sure that, in the context of the rational enlightenment to better live religious life, Greek philosophers also have little or nothing to say: in daily life, all of them follow, in one or another way, the traditions of civil theology, of city customs, popular religiosity.²² In this sense, both Greek and Roman philosophers are "divided people": they follow some theories at school and contradict the very same theories in their daily lives. Thus, it is not a cursory interpretation to postulate that since very early, and also because of religious issues, Christian thinkers felt bound to install a Christian philosophy in which philosophical theories and the everyday religious life should harmonize. As Étienne Gilson's massive inquiry could show, the Fathers of Church and, after them, the scholastics, even without using the expression, discourse having the "Christian philosophy" as a reference.²³

The absence of Christian Philosophy, even in its early stage, is associated to the "ignorance of God" (*ignorantiam veri Dei*), which is the third natural cause of the emergence of idolatry. It was because they ignored "the true God" that men paid divine tribute and worshiped some natural entities, earthly and heavenly, be it for their beauty (*pulchritudo*), be it for causality (*virtus*), be it for both. Aquinas lists water, fire and air as earthly entities. And he quotes the Moon, the Sun and the stars as heavenly entities.²⁴ The set composed by those entities impresses human vision and imagination, which is the reason why it is called cosmos, i.e., a harmonious, beautiful and unique entity. Besides, the intellectual consideration of general events occurred in the

²⁰ See: GILSON, 1941, especially chapters 1-2.

²¹ *ST II-II*, q. 94, a. 2, c: "non esse religionem a philosophis quaerendam".

²² About this topic, see Gilson's discussion on Greek polytheism, especially in Plato and Aristotle: GILSON, 1940, ch. 3.

²³ See Gilson's texts mentioned in note 19.

²⁴ For an analysis on the relation between religiosity and heavenly bodies, specially concerning astrology in early Christianity, see: HEGEDUS, 2003; HEGEDUS, 2007. It is known that Augustine and Aquinas are critics to astrology. About this, see: VERARDI, 2017. On astrology and its relation to astronomy and cosmology in the Middle Ages, see: BELL, 1977; BRUCE, 1993; BRUCE, 2002.

cosmos could be established by a cause and effect relation, such as in the case of the alternance of the tides (the effect) caused by the attractive force of the Moon (cause);²⁵ or the seasons of the year (the effect) caused by the joint motion of planets (the cause)²⁶ and yet the diversity among humans (the effect), specially in body formation, physical beauty and intellectual disposition, whose cause is the motion of the stars.²⁷ Among such celestial entities, the stars, for they are in the boundaries of the cosmos and because they are the most powerful and universal natural causes, are entitled to take the role of cosmic gods (*rectores orbis terrarum*), both for philosophers and for the simple people who follow natural religion.

Aquinas asserts in *ST* II-II, q. 94, a. 4, that the act of worshiping earthly and heavenly entities comes from the disregard of the excellence of the true God, which is the most universal non-natural cause. It is precisely due to the ignorance of divine causality that the effects of God are considered gods. In other words, there is no recognition that the cosmos is effect of God and, in the contrary, because of ignorance, the earthly and the heavenly entities are considered powerful gods that rule the cosmos. Although he recognizes the philosophical and religious naturalness of such an attitude towards heavenly and earthly entities, Aquinas believes it is necessary to overcome such a *status quo*, for the historical emergence of Christianity collides with some natural religion practices, especially polytheist idolatry. In this sense, one of the most urgent tasks of Christian philosophy is the reflection on the human liberation from the serfdom of the “elements of the cosmos”, including the cult to idols.²⁸

II. Thales of Miletus and the *antiqui*: on nature and religion

Among the “elements of the cosmos”, one can find the heavenly bodies. In fact, according to *In Metaph.*, I, 4, the heavenly bodies were worshiped as gods by the natural religion of the Greek and Thales himself, the

²⁵ (DON, 3§): “Aqua enim maris fluentis et refluentis talem motum sortitur praeter proprietatem elementi ex uirtute lune, non per aliquam formam aque impressam sed per ipsam lune motionem, qua scilicet aqua mouetur a luna”.

²⁶ (*In De caelo* II, 4, n. 12): “(...) necesse est esse alium motum, qui est per obliquum circulum, qui proprie causet generationem et corruptionem per elongationem et appropinquationem planetarum ad nos, sicut primus motus causat permanentiam et sempiternitatem in rebus”.

²⁷ (*ST* I, q. 96, a. 3, c): “(...) secundum diversam dispositionem aeris et diversum situm stellarum, aliqui robustiores corpore generarentur quam alii, et maiores et pulchriores et melius complexionati”.

²⁸ (*ST* III, q. 61, a. 4, obj. 2): “(...) Apostolus dicit, *Galat.* IV, quod, *cum essemus parvuli, sub elementis mundi eramus seruitutes: nunc autem, temporis plenitudine veniente, iam non sumus parvuli*”.

first philosopher, was educated to worship the heavenly bodies and the other Greek gods. In this sense, the complex relation between philosophy and religion dates back to the birth of philosophy, according to Aquinas. Indeed, in *In Metaph.*, I, 4, Aquinas suggests that in Miletus, in Ancient Greece, before the emergence of philosophy, the *antiqui* who led Greek religiosity had established, from a mythological perspective, a cosmology, a cosmography and theology which,²⁹ to some extent, influenced Thales's philosophy, for they were regarded as authorities (*auctoritates*).³⁰ Thus, for Aquinas, Thales's notion of divinity, is simultaneously philosophical and religious for it is a principle learned by reason as cosmic cause and it is an object of cult.

Three are the central notions which explain the cosmology, the cosmography and theology of the *antiqui*: water, heavenly bodies and divinity. Water is regarded as "the principle of things", i.e. the principle of whatever constitutes the cosmos (*aqua est principium omnium*).³¹ Thus, not only particular things are generated from water, but also the cosmos itself was generated from water. Therefore, water is, for the *antiqui*, the universal principle of cosmos which, by nature, precedes everything, including the noblest entities: the heavenly bodies and the divinity.

Among other immanent gods in the cosmos, the *antiqui* worshiped the heavenly bodies, the stars being the most excellent of them because, on the one hand, they have the most regular motion, completing a turn round the Earth in twenty-four hours and, on the other hand, their movement is the fastest in the cosmos.³² Besides, stellar motion collaborates to the religious belief of the *antiqui* that the cosmos is eternal, a belief which, it should be noted, is forwarded through generations by certain Greek educators. Here, another work by Aquinas is very meaningful: *In De caelo*, II, n. 3, 2§.

The human being, specially in childhood, is naturally inclined to believe in the information they learn from the educators, specially their parents. The educators are in charge of introducing their apprentices to divine cult, something that also happened in Ancient Greece. Among the beliefs transmitted through generations by the ancient Greek one can find the

²⁹ The mythological relation between cosmology, cosmography and theology in Ancient Greece is addressed by JAEGER, 1948, especially chapter VI, "The Manifest on Philosophy", p. 124-166. See also: GRANT, 1987a; GRANT, 1987b; GRANT, 1997; GRANT, 2004; GRANT, 2011.

³⁰ (*In Metaph.*, I, 4, n. 15): "Deinde cum dicit sunt autem hic ostendit quomodo Thales inducebatur ad praedictam positionem per auctoritates antiquorum. Et dicit quod aliqui fuerunt antiquiores Thalete et multum ante generationem hominum qui erant tempore Aristotelis, qui fuerunt primo theologizantes, qui visi sunt hanc opinionem de natura habuisse, scilicet quod aqua est principium omnium".

³¹ See previous note.

³² See: *In De caelo* II, 15, n. 2.

divinization of heavenly bodies, which should be worshiped because its motion is endless and is, for this reason, the influencer of human and natural deeds.³³ Besides, it is due to the eternal motion that the Greek religious named the heavenly body as “god” (*theon*), giving birth to astral religiosity.³⁴

Although astral religiosity and philosophy are distinct, they are present in Thales, according to *In Metaph.*, I, 4. Indeed, in the aforementioned text, Aquinas addresses Thales’s theory of nature. For Aquinas, it had two distinct sources: the observation of natural entities which touch the senses and the authority of the antiques. In fact, Aquinas registers: “Thus what Thales is said to have thought about the first cause of things is now clear”.³⁵

In Thales’s description of nature in *In Metaph.*, I, 4, nn. 5-18, Aquinas binds the notion of material cause, primary cause and water. In this context, it is said that Thales is one of the seven sage of Greece, the introducer of speculative philosophy, identified to natural science, who lived in the time Rome was founded and that Achaz was the king of Israel.³⁶ Still in such context, Aquinas states, on the one hand, that, for Thales, the primary philosophy is natural science, for it is only possible to know moving and corporeal substances and, on the other hand, that in Thales’s cosmography, the Earth lies on water.³⁷

Thales’s philosophy of nature is based, according to Aquinas, in the notions of causality and generation. Causality aims the principle of being, and generation, in its turn, to the principle of coming to be. Generation assumes causality, reason why the cause which is the principle of being shall necessarily

³³ I.e. a belief which is also astrological. For further reference on astrology, see note 24.

³⁴ (*In De caelo* II, 1, n. 3, 2§). “Dicit ergo primo quod, quia ex praemissis inclinamur ad credendum sempiternitatem mundi, consequens est quod homo se exhibeat de facili persuasibilem a dictis antiquorum: non tamen quantum ad quoscumque antiquos errantes, sed praecipue quantum ad patres nostros, qui scilicet nos in cultu divino instruxerunt; ut scilicet credamus eorum sermones esse veros, quantum ad hoc quod credamus aliquid esse immortale et divinum, non solum de numero substantiarum immobilium, quae sunt penitus a materia separatae, sed etiam quantum ad corpora quae habent motum, talem tamen ut ipsius motus corporis divini et immortalis non sit aliquis finis, quo scilicet iste motus terminetur, sed magis iste motus sit finis omnium aliorum motuum. Ideo autem hoc attribuit antiquis sermonibus patrum, quia omnes illi qui apud gentiles cultum divinum instituerunt, hoc intendebant, quod cultus divinus exhiberetur caelo tanquam divino et immortalis corpori et quod semper moveretur: unde et a *theon*, quod est semper currere, in graeco *theon*, idest Deum, nominaverunt”.

³⁵ (*In Metaph.*, I, 4, n. 17). “Sic igitur patet quid Thales de prima causa rerum dicitur existimasse”.

³⁶ See: *In Metaph.*, I, 4, n. 10.

³⁷ (*In Metaph.*, I, 4, n. 11): “Nec debet inconveniens videri, si opiniones hic tangit eorum, qui solum de scientia naturali tractaverunt; quia secundum antiquos qui nullam substantiam cognoverunt nisi corpoream et mobilem, oportebat quod prima philosophia esset scientia naturalis, ut in quarto dicitur. Ex hac autem positione ulterius procedebat ad hoc, quod terra esset super aquam fundata, sicut principium supra suum principium”.

be the principle of generation, one generating is bringing something to being.³⁸ “Water”, according to Aquinas, is the name Thales gives to the principle of being and to the principle of generation. Besides the mythological notion of ocean as the utmost gathering of waters,³⁹ the understanding of water as a principle comes from the observation of the unity present in living beings and, even the inanimate, as the case of fire.⁴⁰ Thus, moisture precedes, by nature, all cosmic entities. If water is the principle of moisture, then water precedes moisture; then water precedes, by nature, everything which exists.

Although he mentions Thales’s religious education, as well as clues that he has a natural theology, Aquinas does not articulate in *In Metaph.*, I, 4, nn. 5-18, the notions of “water” and “divinity” for Thales.⁴¹ In fact, Aquinas articulates those notions in the domain of the mythology of the *antiqui* in *In Metaph.*, I, 4, n. 16, text in which it is said that the water and the divinity are regarded as fathers of generation of things.⁴² In this sense, it is only by referring to Thales’s religious education that one is to grasp the possible philosophical articulation between the notions of water and divinity to the philosopher from Miletus, in *In Metaph.*, I, 4, nn. 5-18.

III. *Anima mundi* and idolatry in Thales.

The philosophical articulation between the notions of water and divinity, for Thales, could be rebuilt by the joint reading of *In De anima* I, 5, 8§, *In De anima* I, 5, 13§, *In De anima* I, 12, 2§, and *In De anima* I, 13, 1§. However, even in those texts, philosophical articulation is established through an association to religious articulation, even though philosophy and religion as two remarkably distinct domains. The reference to Orpheus,⁴³ who Aquinas marks as “half” philosopher and “half” poet theologian in *In De anima* I, 12, 13§ displays the aforementioned association.⁴⁴ It is worth pointing out that

³⁸ Cf. *In Metaph.*, I, 4, n. 13.

³⁹ Cf. *In Metaph.*, I, 4, n. 16.

⁴⁰ Cf. *In Metaph.*, I, 4, n. 13.

⁴¹ The relation between philosophy and mythology in the pre-socratics, as well as the notion of natural theology, are topics extensively discussed in literature. For a comprehensive account on those issues, see: JAEGER, 1947; KAHN, 1960.

⁴² (*In Metaph.*, I, 4, n. 16): “Dixerunt enim quod Oceanus, ubi est maxima aquarum aggregatio, et Thetis, quae dicitur dea aquarum, sunt parentes generationis: ex hoc sub fabulari similitudine dantes intelligere aquam esse generationis principium”.

⁴³ As well as the reference to idolatry in *In De anima* I, 13, 1§.

⁴⁴ (*In De anima* I, 12, 13§): “Et quia quidam philosophus qui vocatus est Orpheus, defectivo etiam de anima locutus est quasi in similem defectum incidit: ideo hic adiungit eius defectum. Sciendum est quod

Orpheus's name appears in *In Metaph.*, I, 4, n.16, as a possible authority whose teaching were present in Thales's religious background.⁴⁵ Orpheus, according to Aquinas, discoursed about the soul and about god, both in religious and philosophical realms. Orpheus's notion of soul is mistaken for Aquinas, for it is identified to air, reason why every living entity would have air in its constitution, which is not true, for there are animals which miss in air.⁴⁶

Thales, for Aquinas, is different from Orpheus because he is not a philosopher and a poet theologian, but a philosopher *strictu sensu*. Poetic theology appears in Thales, not in his philosophical principles, but as influence from the *auctoritates* in those principles. The term "gods" (*diis*) in Thales's statement "*omnia esse plena diis*", according to Aquinas, is a philosophical principle with religious implications. In this sense, philosophy and religion, cosmology and theology and, as we shall see, psychology and mechanics (physiology), are domains of human thought which are intimately bound one to another, in Thales's natural philosophy, according to Aquinas's account.

In his reading of Thales's statement, Aquinas asserts:

There are, he says, some who see a soul intermingled with everything, whether simple elements or things composed of these. This perhaps is what Thales meant when he said that everything was full of gods; perhaps he thought that the entire Universe was alive and its life was divine; that just as soul exists everywhere in each living thing so a god was everywhere in the universe and everything therefore was 'full of divinities'. And perhaps this was the notion that underlay idolatry.⁴⁷

What does the idolatry which possibly (*forte*) emerges (*provenit*) from Thales's statement consist of? The question becomes even more interesting if

Orpheus iste fuit unus de primis philosophis qui erant quasi poetae theologi, loquentes metrica de philosophia et de deo, et fuerunt tantum tres, Samius, Orpheus, et quidam alius".

⁴⁵ (*In Metaph.*, I, 4, n. 16): "Ad cuius evidentiam sciendum est, quod apud Graecos primi famosi in scientia fuerunt quidam poetae theologi, sic dicti, quia de divinis carmina faciebant. Fuerunt autem tres, Orpheus, Museus et Linus, quorum Orpheus famosior fuit. Fuerunt autem tempore, quo iudices erant in populo Iudaeorum. Unde patet, quod diu fuerunt ante Thaletem, et multo magis ante Aristotelem qui fuit tempore Alexandri. Isti autem poetae quibusdam aenigmatibus fabularum aliquid de rerum natura tractaverunt".

⁴⁶ Cf. *In De anima* I, 12, 13§.

⁴⁷ (*In De anima* I, 13, 1§): "Dicit ergo quod sunt *quidam* qui *dicunt* animam *misceri in toto* universo, ponentes eam tam in elementis quam in elementatis. Unde quidam philosophus nomine *Thales*, fortassis motus ab hac opinione, *opinatus est omnia plena esse diis*; uolebat enim quod totum uniuersum esset animatum et eius anima esset deus, unde, sicut anima est in qualibet parte animalis et tota, ita uolebat quod in qualibet parte uniuersi esset deus et sic omnia essent plena diis. Et forte ex hoc provenit idolatria".

one is to observe that nowhere in the other three books in *In De anima*, the author uses the term “idolatry”, which, by the way, indicates a religious practice and which properly belongs to religion. The hypothetical idolatry practiced by Thales would be binded, it seems, to the knowledge and the assumption that the cosmos has its own soul, it is alive, and that this soul is god (*totum uniuersum esset animatum et eius anima esset deus*) that, in this sense, would be the formal constituting principle and inseparable from the cosmos. Idolatry, in this context, would also be linked to the admission that god is the genre divinity.⁴⁸ A direct consequence of the admission of the generality of god refers to the attribute of impersonality (*impersonalis*) to the genre “god” which would be, in this case, the divinity shared by all gods, the divine entities. Divinity, in this fashion, for it is impersonal, could reasonably be identified to the *anima mundi*, a notion which Aquinas himself links to Thales’s statement in the aforementioned passage.

The *anima mundi*, god, understood from *In De anima*, I, 5, 8§, and *In De anima* I, 5, 13§, is the driving force (*virtus motiva*), i.e. the universal force simultaneously present in each part and in the set formed by the essential and primary constituents of the whole (*omnia*) which, united, make it a beautiful and only being, a cosmos: the heavens and the elements. If the set formed by the heavens and the elements is in eternal natural motion, as night observation of stars allows one to state, it is necessary to find the cause for the natural motion of the cosmos. This cause, for Thales, according to Aquinas, is god, the universal force. Thus, the hypothetical idolatry practiced by Thales would consist of the knowledge and of the assumption of an inner “cult of mind”⁴⁹ or a “worship” of the universal force which naturally moves the cosmos, i.e. of the inner and reverential naming of the term “god” as a cosmic and impersonal force. Thales or whoever thinks in a similar way would, consequently, have worshiped a cosmic, universal and impersonal force.

It is yet to be questioned, on the one hand, what nature of god in the Thales’s statement “*omnia esse plena diis*” would be, according to Aquinas and what would differentiate the divine cult of the cosmic force hypothetically carried out by Thales (or anyone else), the idolatry, from the divine cult of the force *supernaturales*, effectively carried out by Aquinas himself, the non-idolatry.⁵⁰ In fact, those questions are linked to the fields of knowledge within

⁴⁸ Aquinas rejects the possibility of God being a genre. See: SCG I, 25.

⁴⁹ (ST II-II, q. 94, a. 2, obj. 3): “(...) summus Deus interiori cultu mentis est colendus (...)”.

⁵⁰ It is important to observe that, according to SCG II, cc. 50-54, in God one is to ontologically identify being (*esse*) and essence (*essentia*), reason why, in God, there is no ontological distinction between the substance and the operation (*virtus*), i.e. God is its own operation. In this sense, the divine *virtus* which creates the cosmos is God itself. According to ST I, qq. 64-74, the same force (*virtus*) which creates the

which Thales's statement is read by Aquinas, as well as in the assumption of the notion of a universal force, be it impersonal, as in Thales's case, be it personal, as in Aquinas's. Indeed, for Thales, according to Aquinas, god is identical to the universal driving force, which is the *anima mundi*, so, in Thales's statement there are no boundaries among theology, physics (including mechanics and cosmology) and psychology: investigating the nature of god (theology) is investigating the nature and the cause of motion (physics), the nature of soul (psychology), the nature of force (mechanics) and the nature of the cosmos itself (cosmology).

The philosophical reason from which Aquinas, in *In De anima* I, 13, 1§, indicates the possible link between Thales's statement and the emergence of idolatry lies on the notion of mixture (*mistus*). There would be a mixture between god and the cosmos: god is mixed to the elements (*elementis*), or even to the derivatives of the relations among the elements, among which Aquinas highlights the animals. In fact, in *In De anima* I, 13 1§, it is said that, for Thales, the same way the soul is in every animal and in each part of it, then god is in the entire cosmos and in each part of it. Therefore, Thales, from Aquinas's perspective, does not establish a difference of nature between god and the cosmos, for the form is mixed to the later, reason why the statement "*omnia essent plena diis*" not only enforces polytheism, but also pantheism, and idolatry would apparently come from both.

Although there is not, in pantheism, a radical ontological or natural difference between god and the cosmos, but a mixture of them, there is slight difference between god and the cosmos for Thales, according to Aquinas. Such a difference is analogous to that between the motor and the mobile in a mechanic conception. In the case of animals, motor and mobile, body and soul, are constituents of the same thing. There is no difference of nature among the constituents of the animal, the body and the soul, for both only exist once there is a relation. The difference is only of function: the body is

constituents of the cosmos gives them the very first and proper natural motion, be it centrifuge or centripetal, be it circular. In this sense, the first motion of the cosmos does not have a cause other than the creator. It is exactly to this cosmic force of the first natural motion of the cosmos, which is God, whom Aquinas worships. Concerning Aquinas's divine cult, there two meaningful passages: "Manifestum est itaque quod primum movens est indivisibile: et quia nullam partem habet, sicut etiam est indivisibile punctum; et etiam sicut omnino nullam habens magnitudinem, quasi extra genus magnitudinis existens. - Et sic terminat Philosophus considerationem communem de rebus naturalibus, in primo principio totius naturae, qui est super omnia Deus benedictus in saecula. Amen". (*In Phys.*, VIII, 23, n. 9). "Sic ergo patet quomodo essentia est in substantiis et accidentibus, et quomodo in substantiis compositis et simplicibus, et qualiter in hiis omnibus intentiones uniuersales logicae inueniuntur; excepto primo quod est in fine simplicitatis, cui non conuenit ratio generis aut speciei et per consequens nec diffinitio propter suam simplicitatem: in quo sit finis et consummatio huius sermonis. Amen". (*De ente*, c. 6, 9§).

moved, the soul is the mover. Consequently, god is the soul of the *magnus* body, the mobile that is the cosmos. In short, divine existence only makes sense because there is a cosmos, reason why, in Thales's statement, god would not be the metaphysical cause of the cosmos, once both would be coeternal.

Besides the slight difference between god and the cosmos, Aquinas mentioned another important distinction in *In De anima* I, 5, 8§ for Thales: the distinction between water and soul (of the whole, i.e., the cosmos). In *In De anima* I, 5, 8§, it is said that Thales is the first natural philosopher in the history of philosophy whose concerns are not in the domain of morals, but in the investigation of natural things regarded as a set, the whole. Besides, Thales distinguished the material principle of all things, the water, and the soul as driving force (efficient) which is the origin of the motion of natural things. Here, a question which helps to understand the one on the nature of god previously conceived emerges in Thales's statement: what is the nature of the soul as the origin (efficient) which moves the material principle, water, thus generating the cosmos?

Is curious that Aquinas, on the one hand, explicitly qualifies water, for Thales, as a corporeal universal principle and,⁵¹ on the other hand, gags about the soul as a driving force (universal). In other words, he does not say if the soul (of the whole) is corporeal or not for Thales. However, it seems to be an obvious conclusion: if water and soul are not identical and both are universal, i.e., refer to the whole, the soul, which coincides with the *anima mundi*, to some extent, is incorporeal. Besides, as the soul of the whole is identical to god, for Thales, if he is an anthropomorphist and conceives corporeality for god, it would be very reasonable and important to clarify the notion of idolatry present in *In De anima* I, 13, 1§ that Aquinas indicated it, which is not the case.

It is not prudent to draw conclusion from Aquinas's silence. However, it is reasonable to question his reading of Thales's statement "*omnia esse plena diu*" and its bonds to the notion of idolatry stated by the dominican. More precisely, the investigation could be addressed to the nature of the divinity of the gods potentially present in Thales's statement through the question: is divinity, for Thales, corporeal or non-corporeal? Another question emerges linked to the former: if divinity, for Thales, according to Aquinas, is incorporeal, would there be idolatry in the cult to such divinity? It seems that, even before polytheism, pantheism or even anthropomorphism, it is the impersonality of divinity which first concerns Aquinas in Thales's statement.

⁵¹ (DSS, c. 1): "Primi quidem igitur philosophantium de rerum naturis sola corpora esse aestimaverunt, ponentes prima rerum principia aliqua corporalia elementa, aut unum aut plura. Et si unum, aut aquam, ut Thales Milesius; aut aerem, ut Diogenes; aut ignem, ut Ephasius; aut vaporem, ut Heraclitus".

Final remarks

Aquinas's discussion on Thales's philosophy of nature is exclusively found in the former's comments to Aristotle.⁵² However, concerning the relation between the notions of *anima mundi* and idolatry – which was probably introduced by Thales –, Thales's position is virtually addressed in Aquinas's critique to the position of the *gentiles*, namely the thesis according to which God is cosmic form. In this context, after arguing God is not cosmic form, Aquinas states that there is:

(...) the error of the Gentiles, who said that God is the soul of the heavens, or even the soul of the whole world. Thereby they defended the error of idolatry, by saying that the whole world was God not by reason of the body but by reason of the soul; just as man is said to be wise not by reason of the body but by reason of the soul. On the basis of this error the Gentiles thought it to follow that, not unfittingly, divine worship should be shown to the world and its parts.⁵³

The word *gentiles* is employed by Aquinas in order to compose the title of one of his main works: the *Summa contra gentiles*, written from 1259 to 1264.⁵⁴ In a general sense, the term *gentiles* means “non-Christian”.⁵⁵ In this sense,

⁵² Except *DSS*, c. 1.

⁵³ (*SCG* I, 27, 8§): “(...) gentiliū error (...) qui dicebant Deum esse animam caeli, vel etiam animam totius mundi. Et ex hoc errorem idolatriae defendebant, dicentes totum mundum esse Deum, non ratione corporis, sed ratione animae, sicut homo dicitur sapiens non ratione corporis sed animae: quo supposito, sequi opinabantur quod mundo et partibus eius non indebite divinus cultus exhibeatur”.

⁵⁴ See: TORRELL, 1996, 101-102; WEISHEIPL, 1974, p. 132. It is of consensus in secondary literature the postulate of *SCG* as one of the main works of Aquinas and of the Middle Ages. Furthermore, it is known that the author himself had the work in high account: “(...) le *Contra Gentiles* est une œuvre que s. Thomas a choyée: il l'a relue, modifiée et corrigée à plusieurs reprises”. (GILS, 1992, p. 204). Gils adds: “Tous les chapitres conservés en autographe ont subi au moins une révision, la plupart em ont connu deux ou trois, ou même quatre, si on tient compte de la dernière relecture”. (*Idem*, 207). Concerning the initial reception of the work, Weisheipl summarizes: “Although Thomas' *Summa contra gentiles* was not a university text, it was sold by the University of Paris's stationer as late as February 1304; it was listed as containing fifty-seven pecias, and sold for forty-four denarii, the same as for the third part of his *Summa theologiae* in fifty-five pecias. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries it was translated into various Near Eastern languages”. (WEISHEIPL, 1974, p. 134).

⁵⁵ The general sense of *gentiles* might comprehend, on the one hand, the other two Book religions, Judaism and Islam, and, on the other hand, the natural religiosity, i.e., religion which is not linked to divine revelation and is practiced in the past or in the present by ordinary people, philosophers and others. (For the general sense of *gentiles*, see: ADLER, 1938). The sense of *gentiles* as the “non-Christian” appears, for instance, in *SCG* I, 2, 3§: “Contra singulorum autem errores difficile est procedere, propter duo. Primo, quia non ita sunt nobis nota singulorum errantium dicta sacrilega ut ex his quae dicunt possimus rationes assumere ad eorum errores destruendos. Hoc enim modo usi sunt antiqui

Aquinas aims to refute the “mistake” of the “non-Christians”, be it in the domain of philosophy, by refuting the proposition “God is the *anima mundi*”, be it in the domain of natural religion, by refuting idolatry, it is a consequence, it should be reminded, of philosophical conceptions.

As he intends to refute the theory of *anima mundi*, Aquinas addresses the issue in *SCG* I, 27 and on *SCG* III, 120. Among the theses defended by the author, three can be taken as directive, one cosmological and two metaphysical. They are: (i) the cosmos requires a primary motor absolutely still (*SCG* I, 27, 5§); (ii) there is, in the creature, an ontological distinction between form and being (*SCG* I, 27, 2§); (iii) God is transcendent (*SCG* III, 120, 5§).

doctores in destructionem errorum gentilium, quorum positiones scire poterant quia et ipsi gentiles fuerant, vel saltem inter gentiles conversati et in eorum doctrinis eruditi”. According to *ST* I, q. 1, a. 8, ad2, the “*antiqui doctores*” are the “*doctores Ecclesiae*”, i.e., the Fathers of the Church. From this perspective, the Fathers who were not educated in the Christian principles from their early life would be *gentiles*, i.e. “non-Christian”. The notion of *gentiles* could even be a synonym of “pagan”, as Le Goff pointed out: “The precise meaning and historical limits of the word *paganus* are open to discussion. It is possible to agree with Michel Roblin that the term has the same meaning as the Latin *gentilis*, the Greek *ethnikos*, and the Hebrew *goy*, and ‘that paganism is not identical with being of rural character and that the use of the term may simply be attributed to the Hebrew origins of the Christian vocabulary’. Nevertheless, for Christian authors from the fifth century on, the pagani were essentially peasants and vice versa”. (LE GOFF, 1980, p. 92). There is also a more specific sense of the notion of *gentiles*: the complete ignorance towards “God”, as it is described in the three Book religions. In this sense, “(...) the *Gentiles* who were completely unaware of him [God]”. (LE GOFF, 1988, p. 146). In this domain one can also place the Greek and Roman thinkers who lived before the emergence of Christianity and Islam: they had not been educated about “God” by the Book. Besides, it is possible to refer to the lack of touch with revelation with the term “pagan”, as Aquinas seems to see it later in the aforementioned passage: “Secundo, quia quidam eorum, ut Mahumetistae et Pagani, non conveniunt nobiscum in auctoritate alicuius Scripturae, per quam possint convinci, sicut contra Iudaeos disputare possumus per vetus testamentum, contra haereticos per novum. Hi vero neutrum recipiunt. Unde necesse est ad naturalem rationem recurrere, cui omnes assentire coguntur. Quae tamen in rebus divinis deficiens est. Simul autem veritatem aliquam investigantes ostendemus qui errores per eam excludantur: et quomodo demonstrativa veritas, fidei Christianae religionis concordet”. (*SCG* I, 2, 3§). Although the *mahumetistae* and the *iudaeos* are not baptized, Aquinas distinguishes them from pagans, even provided that they are not baptized, i.e., pagans. The use of “pagan” in the passage aims to refer to the individuals who, somehow, have (or had) bonds with natural religion. Thus, in the general sense of “non-Christian”, the notion of *gentiles* includes Judaism, Islam and natural religiosity. Besides, as natural religiosity was, somehow and to some extent, to be found in Greek and Roman philosophers, the “mistakes” Aquinas intended to fight (*destruere*) in *SCG* are out of religion (natural and revealed) and of philosophy. It is also important to give some attention to the word “fight”. As it seems explicit, it has nothing to do with the Cruzades or any sort of physical violence. Indeed, Aquinas has in mind a “fight” through argumentation: he sees the possibility of dialogue with the diverse, the “non-Christian”, aiming to convince them to become Christians through the force of philosophy (*ratio naturalis*) and of philosophical argumentation. That means holding that, for Aquinas, Christianity is a “world-religion” (JAEGER, 1962, p. 5). In fact, the last lines of the aforementioned passage show that Aquinas conceives philosophy (*ratio naturalis*) and Christianity harmonize.

The cosmological thesis is established by Aquinas on the following terms:

The same conclusion can also be reached in the following way from the eternity of motion. If God is the form of some movable body, since He is the first mover, the composite will be self-moving. But something self-moving can be moved and not-moved. Both possibilities are found in it. But such a being does not of itself have an indefectibility of motion. Above the self-moving being, therefore, we must posit another first mover, which gives to the self-moving being the endlessness of its motion. Thus, God, Who is the first mover, is not the form of a self-moving body.⁵⁶

Motion that, in the aforementioned passage, is related to the category of place, referring to locomotion, assumes the thing which performs it: the *mobilis*. The mobile, in its turn, from a cosmological perspective of locomotion in general, refers to another constituent of the cosmos, in natural locomotion, or to the set of mobiles in eternal natural locomotion (heaven and elements), i.e., the cosmos itself. From one or the other perspective, the mobile is said to be self-moving, composed by motor, the act, and moved, the potency.

Aquinas indicates, in the passage, that the self-moving is not absolutely independent from locomotion: even if it is not *hic et nunc* in locomotion, being consequently still, it can start locomotion. This possibility, intrinsic to the nature of the self-moving and, more precisely, to its form, makes the self-moving body dependent on something else, an absolutely immobile mover, i.e. whose possibility of locomotion or stillness does not exist, reason why such a motor could not be understood as a form of the self-moving. In this sense, as the self-moving is a constituting part of the cosmos, or the cosmos itself, and, as it is *hic et nunc* in eternal and natural locomotion, it needs an absolutely immobile primary mover which is, for Aquinas, God.

Although Aquinas does not employ the term “separate” (*separatus*) or “distinct” (*distinctio*) when he articulates the notions of primary mover and self-moving body in *SCG* I, 27, 5§, it is reasonable to understand that the existence of the primary mover is beyond the form of the self-moving body, being separate or distinct from the form of the self-moving body. If one is to

⁵⁶ (*SCG* I, 27, 5§): “Hoc idem potest ostendi ex aeternitate motus, sic. Si Deus est forma alicuius mobilis, cum ipse sit primum movens, compositum erit movens seipsum. Sed movens seipsum potest moveri et non moveri. Utrumque igitur in ipso est. Quod autem est huiusmodi, non habet motus indeficientiam ex seipso. Oportet igitur supra movens seipsum ponere aliud primum movens, quod largiatur ei perpetuitatem motus. Et sic Deus, qui est primum movens, non est forma corporis moventis seipsum”.

understand that the self-moving body is the cosmos, then the primary mover is not the cosmic form (*non est forma corporis moventis seipsam*). Besides that, if the self-moving body is *hic et nunc* in eternal natural locomotion, that is also due to the efficient causality of the primary mover which, in this case, is not only the cause *essendi*, the *creator*, but also the cause of locomotion, i.e., the efficient cause which prompts the self-moving body to leave stillness, the later being the one with to fulfill the requirements to keep itself in endless natural locomotion.

It seems that the notion of form is central to the understanding of the relation between the primary mover and the self-moving body, i.e., God and the cosmos. Besides the cosmological argument, Aquinas employs the notion of form in the metaphysical argument which holds the ontological distinction between form and being (*esse*) in every being, except God. Such an argument is summarized by Aquinas in the following statement: “The form of a body is not the being itself, but a principle of being”.⁵⁷ Is important to observe that, on the one hand, the distinction between the form and being, in the argument from *SCG* I, 27, 2§, is addressed to the notion of body and, on the other hand, that this distinction is also applied to the incorporeal beings (intelligences/angels), as the author himself establishes in *SCG* II, 50-54.

The restriction of the distinction between form and being in *SCG* I, 27, 2§ aims precisely to criticize the identification between God and *anima mundi*, once the theory of the *gentiles* holds that god as form is the soul and the cosmos, in its turn, is the body. Aquinas needs to refute two propositions before criticizing the aforementioned identification: “God is corporeal form” and “God is corporeal soul”. In order to do this, the author holds that the form (corporeal) is the principle of being (*principium essendi*), and should consequently be distinct from the being itself (*ipsum esse*), i.e. from the being without a principle.

The metaphysical notion of principle, in the argument of the distinction between the form and the being in *SCG* I, 27, 2§ denotes the mediation between the being and the body. The body onely possess being because form transmits being to the body, i.e. it mediates the relation between the being and the body. Form is, therefore, the body’s principle of being. As, for Aquinas, the notion of body is always said of the things of nature, i.e. for the things constituted by form and matter, the being relates to the matter through form in the constitution of the body. In this sense, the body is constituted by three really distinct constituents: the being (*esse*), the form and the matter. It is through this perspective that one should understand the end of the argument

⁵⁷ (*SCG* I, 27, 2§): “Forma corporis non est ipsum esse, sed essendi principium”.

in *SCG* I, 27, 2§: “(...) God is being itself. He is, therefore, not the form of a body.”⁵⁸ If God is not corporeal form, it cannot be the cosmic form: for the *gentiles*, as already indicated, the cosmos is the body of the whole.

The conclusion of *SCG* I, 27, 2§ also helps to understand the thesis held by Aquinas in *SCG* III, 120, 5§: God is transcendent (*exaltatus*),⁵⁹ for if God is not the cosmic form, but exists, then it is beyond the cosmos.⁶⁰ Besides, it is quite intriguing to note that Aquinas uses the thesis of divine transcendence to philosophically justify that only God is entitled to be worshiped, consequently binding philosophy and religion. The argument is summarized in the following passage:

But an opinion on the point that God is one, exalted above all things, cannot be established in us through sensible things unless we honor Him with something unique, which we call divine cult. So, it is evident that a true opinion concerning the one principle is weakened if divine cult is offered to several beings.⁶¹

The man must address something separate to God, the divine cult, for God itself, is separate, i.e., it is beyond the cosmos.⁶² The divine separation from the cosmos could be understood from an assertion found in *SCG* I, 27, 2§, i.e. God is the being in itself (*Deus est ipsum esse*), what means saying that God exists and his existence has no cause. Thus, there is, on the one hand, the evidence of the existence of sensitive things (*sensibilia*)⁶³ and, on the other hand, the philosophical admission of the existence of something which exists beyond sensitive things, God, as it is the cause of existence of the sensitive things and the cosmos itself. In this sense, if God is transcendent and *causa essendi*, it is not cosmic form, therefore, it is inconsistent to hold that he is the *anima mundi* and, consequently, the practice of idolatry, as Thales of Miletus possibly implied in the statement “*omnia esse plena diis*”, according to Aquinas himself.

⁵⁸ (*SCG* I, 27, 2§): “(...) *Deus est ipsum esse. Non ergo est Deus forma corporis*”.

⁵⁹ For the notion of divine transcendence in Aquinas, see: AERTSEN, 1988; AERTSEN, 1996b.

⁶⁰ According to Aquinas, the existence of God is not limited by the cosmos as a whole or by part of it. Nonetheless, divine presence is to be found in the cosmos as a whole and in every part of it. See: *SCG* III, 68: “(...) *quod necesse est Deum esse ubique et in omnibus rebus*”.

⁶¹ (*SCG* III, 120, 5§): “*Opinio autem de hoc quod Deus sit unus, supra omnia exaltatus, per sensibilia firmari non potest in nobis nisi per hoc quod ei aliquid separatim exhibemus, quod dicimus cultum divinum*”.

⁶² (*SCG* III, 120, 11§): “(...) *Deum esse separatum, et ab ipso existere omnes alias intellectuales substantias, sive separatas sive corpori coniunctas*”.

⁶³ See: *SCG* III, 120, 5§.

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