

Alexander Fidora*

Cognitio de Deo.
Philosophy and Theology in Nicholas of Lyra's
Principium

Cognitio de Deo. Filosofía y teología en el *principium* de Nicolás de Lira

Resumen

Nicolás de Lira se inició como maestro de teología en París en 1308. Siguiendo la tradición de otros discursos inaugurales, su *principium*, que nos ha sido transmitido como primer prólogo de la *Postilla literalis super totam Bibliam*, intenta establecer la preeminencia de la Sagrada Escritura con respecto a todas las demás formas del saber. Así pues, basándose en una cita del comienzo del *De anima* de Aristóteles, Nicolás sostiene que la Sagrada Escritura y la teología superan claramente a la filosofía, aunque esta última sea capaz de alcanzar el conocimiento de Dios. Si bien sus argumentos se apoyan principalmente en Tomás de Aquino y su epistemología, también incluyen elementos franciscanos que son difíciles de reconciliar con la interpretación dominante de *De anima* I, 1. Las tensiones resultantes apuntan a los desafíos sistemáticos generales a los que se enfrentaban los teólogos de su tiempo a la hora de asentar los fundamentos epistemológicos de su disciplina.

Palabras-clave: Discursos inaugurales; Relación entre filosofía y teología; *De anima*; Tomás de Aquino; Ciencias prácticas vs. teóricas.

Abstract

Nicholas of Lyra incepted as a Master of Theology at Paris in 1308. Following the tradition of other inception speeches, his *principium*, which has been transmitted to us as the first prologue to the *Postilla literalis super totam Bibliam*, sets out to establish the preeminence of Holy Scripture over all other forms of knowledge. Basing himself on a quotation from the beginning of Aristotle's *De*

* Alexander Fidora, ICREA Research Professor, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, MRA, 08193 Bellaterra, Spain; alexander.fidora@icrea.cat. Principal Researcher of the TALDOSSIER-project, financed by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (PID 2020-112592GB-I00). I thank Robert D. Hughes (Prague) for his comments.

anima, Nicholas argues that Scripture and theology clearly surpass philosophy, albeit that the latter is indeed capable of attaining knowledge of God. While his arguments draw principally upon Thomas Aquinas and his epistemology, they also include Franciscan elements which are difficult to reconcile with the interpretation of *De anima* I, 1 then prevailing. The resulting tensions are indicative of the broader systematic challenges theologians were facing as regards the epistemological foundations of their discipline.

Keywords: Inception speeches; Relationship between philosophy and theology; *De anima*; Thomas Aquinas; Practical vs. Theoretical sciences.

1. Introduction

Nicholas of Lyra, the celebrated author of the *Postilla litteralis super totam Biblam*, completed his studies at Paris in the year 1308, at which point he incepted as a Master of Theology¹. During this event he was obliged to deliver a *principium biblicum*, that is to say, an inception speech, wherein the candidates for a master's degree would offer a concise introduction to Holy Scripture and theology². Some of the prospective masters of theology combined this exercise with a critical appraisal of philosophy and, in particular, of the relationship pertaining between it and theology. These so-called comparative *principia* represent important contributions to the epistemological discussions of their day, allowing us to understand how university theologians viewed both themselves and their philosophical counterparts³.

As we shall see, Nicholas of Lyra's *principium biblicum* is a notable example of the comparative inception speech. The so-called *Commendatio Sacrae Scripturae in generali*, which has come down to us as the first prologue to Nicholas's

¹ See D. C. Klepper, *The Insight of Unbelievers. Nicholas of Lyra and Christian Reading of Jewish Texts in the Later Middle Ages*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 2007, p. 7 and note 35. For a survey of the state-of-the-art on Nicholas's life and works, see the articles gathered together in P. D. W. Krey – L. Smith (eds.), *Nicholas of Lyra: The Sense of Scripture*, Brill, Leiden 2000, pp. 1-18, and, more recently, G. Dahan (ed.), *Nicolas de Lyre: Franciscain du XIV^e siècle, exégète et théologien*, Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, Paris 2011.

² For a succinct introduction to the genre, see A. Sulavik, «*Principia* and *introitus* in Thirteenth-Century Christian Biblical Exegesis, with Related Texts», in G. Cremascoli – F. Santi (eds.), *La Bibbia del XIII secolo. Storia del testo, storia dell'esegesi*, SISMEL, Florence 2004, pp. 269-321.

³ See the useful typology of Biblical *principia* in T. Prügl, «Medieval Biblical Principia as Reflections on the Nature of Theology», in M. Olszewski (ed.), *What is 'Theology' in the Middle Ages? Religious Cultures of Europe (11th–15th Centuries) as Reflected in their Self-Understanding*, Aschendorff, Münster i.W. 2007, pp. 253-275.

Postilla litteralis (1322-1331)⁴, opens with a verse from Jesus Sirach 24, which verse serves as its *thema*, namely, v. 23: «Haec omnia liber vitae» (All this [is in] the book of life)⁵. Regarding this verse, Nicholas claims that each word thereof stands for one of the prerogatives of Holy Scripture or theology:

In quo Sacra Scriptura quadrupliciter describitur secundum quatuor excellentias, quibus omnem scripturam aliam excellit. Primo enim describitur ut singularis eminentiae, quod notat pronomen singulare, cum dicitur, haec. Secundo describitur ut generalis continentiae, quod ostendit signum universale, cum dicitur, omnia. Tertio, ut specularis intelligentiae, quod denotat conditio libri, cum dicitur, liber. Quarto ut salutaris efficacie, quod ostendit consecutio finis intenti, cum dicitur, vitae⁶.

According to Nicholas, the term *haec* – which he seems to interpret as a (feminine) singular pronoun designating *Sacra Scriptura* – denotes the preeminence of Holy Scripture (or theology) over other kinds of knowledge, and over philosophical knowledge in particular; *omnia* points to the universal nature and self-sufficiency of Holy Scripture; *liber* to its specular character as a mirror of intelligible truth⁷; and *vitae* to its salvific efficacy.

Key to Nicholas's argument, undoubtedly, is the position he adopts towards the interpretation of the pronoun «*haec*». This interpretation presents him with the opportunity to draw a thorough epistemological and gnoseological comparison between philosophy and theology, with particular reference to the differences between the *cognitio de Deo* made available by each discipline. The analysis I offer shall focus accordingly upon the first of the four parts constituting Nicholas's *principium*, to wit, his interpretation of the pronoun «*haec*» as expressing the «*singularis eminentia*» of Holy Scripture⁸.

⁴ See Nicholas of Lyra, *Postilla super totam Bibliam*, 4 vols., Johannes Grüninger, Strasbourg 1492, reprinted Minerva, Frankfurt am Main 1971, f. Aiir-v (this and other editions of the *Postilla* follow the manuscripts of the work, which likewise contain Nicholas's *principium*; see, for instance, Basel, Universitätsbibliothek, Ms. A II, 1, ff. 1r-2v). In what follows, the *Commendatio Sacrae Scripturae in generali* will be quoted according to the easily accessible edition present in Patrologia latina 113, cols. 25-30, wherein it precedes the edition of the *Glossa ordinaria* (references to the Strasbourg edition are given in parentheses).

⁵ Nicholas of Lyra, *Commendatio Sacrae Scripturae in generali*, PL 113, col. 25 (f. Aiir).

⁶ *Ibid.*, PL 113, col. 25 (f. Aiir).

⁷ This notion, which also appears in Robert Grosseteste's *Dictum 3* and Henry of Ghent's *principium*, was subsequently adopted by John Wyclif in his *principium* of 1372/73. See G. Zamagni, «'Through the Looking-Glass'. John Wyclif, la Scrittura e l'ermeneutica», *Annali di studi religiosi* 3 (2002) 265-276.

⁸ For a discussion of the general outline of the *principium*, see I. C. Levy, «Nicholas of Lyra. The

2. Nicholas's Epistemology Between Aristotle and Aquinas

In order to prove theology's preeminence over all the other disciplines, Nicholas turns first of all to a philosophical source, namely, Aristotle. At the very beginning of *De anima*, the Greek philosopher had discussed the status of psychology as a science, concluding that it merited first place among those disciplines pertaining to natural inquiry:

We regard all knowledge as beautiful (*kalos*) and valuable (*timios*), but one kind more so than another, either in virtue of its accuracy (*kat' akribēian*), or because it relates to higher inquiry and more wonderful things (*tō beltionōn te kai thaumasiōterón einai*). On both these counts it is reasonable to regard the inquiry concerning the soul as of the first importance⁹.

The crucial criteria for this epistemological appraisal of psychology are its accuracy and the status of its subject matter, two criteria which were usually referred to in Latin as the «certitudo» of a science and the «nobilitas» of its subject matter¹⁰. Within theological inception speeches dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth century, these preliminary reflections from Aristotle's *De anima* I, 1, in fact, constituted recurrent motifs¹¹, whereas in contemporaneous philosophical

Biblical Prologues», in O. Wischmeyer (ed.), *Handbuch der Bibelhermeneutiken. Von Origenes bis zur Gegenwart*, de Gruyter, Berlin – Boston 2016, pp. 255-270.

⁹ Aristotle, *De anima* I, 1, 402a 1-4. English translation from Aristotle, *On the Soul*, ed. and trans. W. S. Hett (LCL 288), Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1957, p. 9.

¹⁰ See, for instance, J. Hamesse, *Les Auctoritates Aristotelis. Un florilège médiéval. Étude historique et édition critique*, Publications universitaires, Louvain 1974, p. 174. In James of Venice's translation of *De anima* as well as in William of Moerbeke's later revision thereof, Aristotle's criteria were rendered into Latin as «certitudo», as pertaining to the mode of a science, and «melior/mirabilior», as pertaining to the subject matter thereof. See the edition of James of Venice's translation in Albertus Magnus, *De anima*, ed. C. Stroick (Ed. Colon. VII/1), Aschendorff, Münster i.W. 1968, p. 3; for William of Moerbeke's text, see Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri De anima*, ed. R.-A. Gauthier (Ed. Leon. XLV/1), Commissio Leonina – Vrin, Rome – Paris 1984, p. 3.

¹¹ See, for instance, Stephen of Besançon's *principium* dating from 1286, edited in N. Spatz, *Principia: A Study and Edition of Inception Speeches Delivered before the Faculty of Theology at the University of Paris, ca. 1180-1286*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University 1992, pp. 218-272, at p. 246, and the (inaugural) lecture by Nicholas Ockham, from the same year, edited in J. C. Benson, «A Witness to the Early Reception of Bonaventure's *Collationes in Hexaëmeron*: Nicholas of Ockham's *Leccio* at Oxford (c. 1286) – Introduction and Text», *Medieval Sermon Studies* 58 (2014) 28-46, at p. 39. In Robert Holcot's *introitius* to *Genesis* (ca. 1335), *De anima* I, 1, 402a 1, even serves as the opening line; see Pascale Bermon, «Un sermon inaugural attribué à Robert Holcot dans le manuscrit Toulouse 342», *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 85 (2018) 203-221, at p. 213.

discussions of epistemological questions they made an appearance far less frequently. Nicholas of Lyra manifestly follows the former tradition, since he states that the «honorableness» of a science depends upon the following:

Circa primum sciendum quod una scientia eminentior est altera seu honorabilior duplice de causa, ut habetur primo *De anima*. Una est, quia est de nobiliore subiecto: alia, quia procedit certiori modo. Et propter utramque Sacra Scriptura, quae proprie theologia dicitur, cum ipsa sola sit textus huius scientiae, omnes scientias antecellit¹².

The dignity of a science's subject matter and the certainty attaching thereto will thus guide Nicholas's comparison of the differing epistemological status attaching to the secular sciences, on the one hand, and to theology, on the other – a comparison which draws heavily upon Thomas Aquinas, as is shown by the way Nicholas's argument unfolds¹³. Thus, elaborating upon the words of Aristotle, Nicholas advances the claim that theology excels all the other disciplines for the following two reasons:

Primo, quia habet Deum pro subiecto, qui est in summo totius nobilitatis: propter quod nominatur theologia, quasi sermo de Deo, secundo quia procedit modo certiori; aliae enim scientiae humanitas repertae procedunt per investigationem rationis humanae. In quo quidem processu licet non sit error quantum ad cognitionem primorum principiorum, quae sunt per se nota (secundum quod dicitur secundo *Metaphys.*: 'In foribus quis delinquit'), tamen in deductione conclusionum ex principiis potest esse error, maxime quantum ad conclusiones a primis principiis longinquis¹⁴.

As far as the subject matter of theology, on the one hand, and that of the remaining sciences, on the other, are concerned, Nicholas holds that the former is the worthiest of all possible such, namely, God, who gives his name to this very discipline, since theology means 'discourse about God' (*sermo de Deo*) – an etymology which draws upon a passage from Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*¹⁵. In its

¹² Nicholas of Lyra, *Commendatio Sacrae Scripturae in generali*, PL 113, cols. 25-26 (f. Aii).

¹³ The dependence of Nicholas's *principium* on Aquinas has been underscored by, among others, G. Zamagni, «Ermeneutica e metafisica: I due Prologhi della *Postilla litteralis* di Nicola di Lyra O.F.M.», *Dianoia* 12 (2007) 57-85, and M. Á. Tábet, «El misterio de la revelación divina en la Biblia según Nicolás de Lira», in C. Izquierdo (ed.), *Dios en la palabra y en la historia: XIII Simposio Internacional de Teología de la Universidad de Navarra*, Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona 1993, pp. 569-578.

¹⁴ Nicholas of Lyra, *Commendatio Sacrae Scripturae in generali*, PL 113, col. 26 (f. Aii).

¹⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum (Ed. Leon. IV-XII), 9 vols., Ex Typographia Polyglotta, Rome 1888-1906, 1^a, q. 1, a. 7, s. c., vol. I, p. 19: «[...] illud

modus procedendi as well, theology is said to excel philosophy and the secular disciplines, since the former brings greater certitude than do the latter (*procedit modo certiori*). It is noteworthy here that, according to Nicholas, the origins of the limited degree of certainty attaching to philosophical knowledge lie not in the principles pertaining thereto, which are indeed *per se nota*, but rather in one's rational deductions therefrom, which are said to be prone to error. This doctrine is likewise reminiscent of Thomas Aquinas, who makes the same point in his *Sentences* commentary¹⁶.

3. The Franciscan Twist to Nicholas's Argument

Following his explication of *De anima* I, 1, Nicholas goes on to quote a Biblical text, namely, Deuteronomy 4:6. The verse in question, which in all likelihood he draws from the epistemological discussions found at the beginning of the *Summa theologiae*¹⁷, is designed to offer scriptural confirmation of theology's preeminence in terms of both its subject matter and its *modus procedendi*:

[...] de singulari eminentia huius scientiae dicitur Deuteronomii quarto: 'Haec est sapientia vestra, et intellectus coram populis.' Sapientia enim dicitur proprie illa scientia quae considerat altissimas causas, ut habetur primo *Metaphys.* Sacra vero Scriptura habet Deum pro subiecto, ut dictum est, qui est prima causa simpliciter omnium et ideo proprie dicitur Sapientia¹⁸.

When it comes to theology's subject matter, Nicholas argues that Deuteronomy 4:6 speaks of theology as wisdom (*sapientia*) specifically on account of the loftiness of such subject matter. Moreover, as he goes on to explain, the verse

est subiectum scientiae, de quo est sermo in scientia. Sed in hac scientia fit sermo de Deo: dicitur enim 'theologia', quasi 'sermo de Deo'. Ergo Deus est subiectum huius scientiae».

- ¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, ed. P. Mandonnet – M. F. Moos, 4 vols., Lethielleux, Paris 1929–1956, lib. 2, d. 24, q. 3, a. 3, ad 2, vol. II, p. 624: «Ad secundum dicendum, quod intellectus non est idem quod ratio. Ratio enim importat quemdam discursum unius in aliud; intellectus autem importat subitam apprehensionem alicuius rei; et ideo intellectus proprie est principiorum, quae statim cognitioni se offerunt, ex quibus ratio conclusiones elicit, quae per inquisitionem innotescunt; unde sicut in speculativis in intellectu principiorum non potest esse error, sed in deductione conclusionum ex principiis, ita etiam in operativis intellectus semper est rectus, sed ratio recta et non recta».
- ¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I^a, q. 1, a. 7, s. c., cit., vol. I, p. 17: «Videtur quod haec doctrina non sit sapientia. [...]. Sed contra est quod dicitur Deut. IV, in principio legis: 'haec est nostra sapientia et intellectus coram populis'».
- ¹⁸ Nicholas of Lyra, *Commendatio Sacrae Scripturae in generali*, PL 113, col. 26 (f. Aii).

under discussion calls theology the intellect (*intellectus*), that is, the «habitus principiorum», which is in itself infallible, and cannot give way to erroneous deductions, since its principles are afforded by no less than divine revelation¹⁹. The verse, therefore, seems to confirm Nicholas's Thomist interpretation of Aristotle's *De anima* I, 1, in terms of both the particular status of theology's subject matter and the certainty of its method.

Nicholas's quotation from Deuteronomy, however, functions not only by corroborating the results of his previous inquiries, but also by contributing novel perspectives. These new insights derive from his exegesis of the pronoun «vestra» (*haec est sapientia vestra*), which serves, according to Nicholas, to mark the difference between wisdom that is theological and wisdom that is philosophical. As Nicholas concedes at this point, philosophy may also be termed wisdom, insofar, that is, as metaphysics considers God as First Principle. However, this is not «our» – but, rather, «your» – wisdom, in other words, the wisdom available to philosophers, which wisdom falls short of theological such in at least two respects. Nicholas addresses these shortcomings under the rubrics of «in proprietatibus de Deo cognitis» and «in fine cognitionis»²⁰.

Regarding the first of these questions, that is, the scope of the philosophers' *cognitio de Deo*, Nicholas sides once more with Thomas Aquinas, who understands philosophical knowledge to be concerned with very specific and fundamental divine properties, such as God's existence, His unity, etc., namely, matters pertaining to the *praeambula fidei*²¹. As Nicholas and Aquinas explain, in Book 12 of his *Metaphysics* Aristotle had proven God's unity, while in Book 8 of the *Physics* one finds proof of his infinite power²². However, neither Aristotle nor

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, PL 113, col. 27 (f. Aii): «Sed quoniam Sacra Scriptura non solum excellit alias in quantum est de subiecto nobiliori, sed etiam in quantum procedit modo certiori, videlicet per divinam revelationem, cui non potest subesse falsum: ideo subditur in auctoritate praemissa: 'Et intellectus coram populis.' Intellectus enim proprie dicitur habitus principiorum, circa quae non est error».

²⁰ *Ibid.*, PL 113, cols. 26-27 (f. Aii).

²¹ See the *locus classicus* in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, cura et studio Fratrum Praedicatorum (Ed. Leon. XIII-XV), 3 vols., Commissio Leonina – Typis Riccardi Garroni, Rome 1918-1930, cap. 3, vol. I, p. 7: «Est autem in his quae de Deo confitemur duplex veritatis modulus. Quaedam namque vera sunt de Deo quae omnem facultatem humanae rationis excedunt, ut Deum esse trinum et unum. Quaedam vero sunt ad quae etiam ratio naturalis pertingere potest, sicut est Deum esse, Deum esse unum, et alia huiusmodi; quae etiam philosophi demonstrative de Deo probaverunt, ducti naturalis lumine rationis».

²² See Nicholas of Lyra, *Commendatio Sacrae Scripturae in generali*, PL 113, col. 26 (f. Aii): «Licit enim philosophi habuerint cognitionem de Deo, hoc tamen solum fuit quantum ad pro-

any other philosopher ever attained a «cognitio de proprietatibus divinis transcendentibus investigationem rationis», or rather, insight into God's inner life, viz. the Trinity²³. By adopting this position, Nicholas clearly follows the Thomist account of the relationship between philosophical and theological wisdom.

In a second step – while still commenting upon Deuteronomy 4:6 –, Nicholas expands his argument by affirming that philosophical «sapientia» differs from theological wisdom in yet another respect, namely, with regard to the abovementioned «finis cognitionis», that is, the end to which such knowledge is directed. At this juncture, Nicholas elaborates his own position, which manifestly departs from Aquinas since it reflects his own Franciscan allegiances. More specifically, Nicholas argues that while philosophical knowledge concerning God constitutes an end in itself, theological knowledge in the same respect is directed towards a different end, namely, one's love of God, and thus transcends pure contemplation or «theory»:

[...] philosophi cognitionem de Deo habitam non ordinaverunt ad alium finem, sed ipsam quaeasierunt propter ipsum speculari tantum, in quantum est perfectio ipsius cognoscentis. Cognitionis autem Dei, quae in Sacra Scriptura traditur, ad hoc principaliter quaeritur, ut per ipsum ipse speculans seu contemplans feratur in amorem ipsius obiecti cogniti, scilicet Dei [...] ²⁴.

In line with the Franciscan tradition²⁵, Nicholas advocates a less intellectual-

prietates quae de ipso possunt concludi per investigationem rationis procedentem ex creaturis, sicut Philosophus duodecimo *Metaphys.* probat eius unitatem, et octavo *Physicorum* virtutis infinitatem, et sic de similibus». Exactly the same references appear in Aquinas's *Metaphysics* commentary lib. 1, l. 12, n. 192: «Si enim causae moventes accipiantur proxime, oportet eas esse contrarias, cum earum effectus contrarii appareant. Si autem accipiatur prima causa, tunc oportet esse unum, sicut apparet in duodecimo huius scientiae, et in octavo *Physicorum*». Also see *ibid.*, lib. 3, l. 9, n. 451: «Hoc autem planum est in illis motibus, qui finiuntur in suis terminis. Sed videatur habere instantiam in motu circulari, qui potest esse perpetuus et infinitus, ut probatur in octavo *Physicorum*. Et quamvis supposita sempiternitate motus, tota continuitas circularis motus sit infinita, secundum quod circulatio succedit circulationi, tamen quaelibet circulatio secundum speciem suam, completa et finita est». (Thomas Aquinas, *In duodecim libros Metaphysicorum*, ed. M. R. Cathala – R. M. Spiazzi, Marietti, Turin – Rome 3rd ed. 1977, p. 57 and p. 126, respectively)

²³ See Nicholas of Lyra, *Commendatio Sacrae Scripturae in generali*, PL 113, cols. 26-27 (f. Aii): «Sed prophetae et apostoli sancti, qui hanc Scripturam nobis tradiderunt per revelationem Spiritus Sancti, habuerunt cognitionem de proprietatibus divinis transcendentibus investigationem rationis, ut de pluralitate personarum, earum distinctione in unitate essentiae, et consimilibus».

²⁴ *Ibid.*, PL 113, col. 27 (f. Aii).

²⁵ This Franciscan influence upon Nicholas's *principium* has also been noted by H. Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation. Volume 2: From Late Antiquity to the End of the Middle Ages*, trans. J. O. Duke, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta 2009, p. 250, and, more recently,

ist and more affective notion of theology than authors – such as Thomas Aquinas – who defined theology as a primarily theoretical science²⁶. Accordingly, Nicholas presents the fact that theological knowledge constitutes a means whereby to love God rather than an end in itself as an additional prerogative of theology when set alongside philosophy, and alongside metaphysical knowledge in particular, which latter is indeed considered an end in itself.

As a result of Nicholas's exegesis of Deuteronomy 4:6, philosophy and theology differ not only in terms of their certainty and their subject matter, as Nicholas had already argued on the basis of Aristotle's *De anima*, but rather also do so categorically in terms of the *cognitio de Deo* they offer. In this latter respect, the philosopher's knowledge concerning God is limited to the apprehension of a few of the divine properties and is held to constitute its own end; theological knowledge concerning God, on the other hand, penetrates the divine mysteries and leads one towards the love of God as its ultimate goal.

4. The Problem of Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Finality: Readings of *De anima*

As we have seen, Nicholas combines two different approaches when attempting to establish the epistemological preeminence of theology over philosophy. On the one hand, he offers an Aristotelian-Thomistic account of the relationship between the two disciplines, an account based upon Aristotle's *De anima*, which he reads, in turn, in the light of Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*. On the other hand, he introduces Deuteronomy 4:6 as a scriptural corroboration of the preceding arguments regarding a science's certainty and the dignity of its subject matter. It transpires, however, that the exegesis of this verse not only confirms his previous epistemological claims, but also adds novel criteria thereto, namely, regarding the limited scope of philosophical knowledge concerning God and the affective or practical dimension of theology, which latter has as its goal the theologian's own love of God.

by I. C. Levy, «Nicholas of Lyra (and Paul of Burgos) on the Pauline Epistles», in S. Cartwright (ed.), *A Companion to St. Paul in the Middle Ages*, Brill, Leiden 2013, pp. 265–291, at p. 267.

²⁶ See, for instance, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I^a, q. 1, a. 4, co., cit., vol. I, p. 14: «Unde licet in scientiis philosophicis alia sit speculativa et alia practica, sacra tamen doctrina comprehendit sub se utramque; sicut et Deus eadem scientia se cognoscit, et ea quae facit. Magis tamen est speculativa quam practica: quia principalius agit de rebus divinis quam de actibus humanis; de quibus agit secundum quod per eos ordinatur homo ad perfectam Dei cognitionem, in qua aeterna beatitudo consistit».

What Nicholas fails to mention in his carefully constructed *principium* is that the Franciscan twist to his argument is difficult to reconcile with the prevailing interpretation of Aristotle's epistemological adumbration in *De anima* I, 1. Elaborating upon Aristotle's words according to which sciences may be called «beautiful» (*kalos*) and «honorable» (*timios*) to varying degrees, thirteenth-century commentators developed an epistemological taxonomy opposing those sciences which were simply «good» (*bonus*) and worthy of praise to those which, over and above this, were «honorable» (*honorabilis*). The decisive criterion for this distinction is precisely the question of whether the knowledge obtained within a specific science either constitutes an end in itself or fails to do so. In his commentary on *De anima*, from ca. 1254-1257, Albert the Great writes:

Nec miretur aliquis, quod dicimus omnem scientiam sive notitiam esse de numero bonorum honorabilium, quoniam sunt quaedam scientiae quas non quaerimus propter se, sed ut nobis adminiculentur ad alia [...] Et notitia illorum modorum sciendi non vere est de numero bonorum honorabilium, sed potius de numero notitiarum et bonorum utilium. Honorable quippe est, quod propter seipsum quaerimus, utile autem quod volumus propter alterum²⁷.

Here, Albert leaves no room for doubt regarding the fact that sciences whose knowledge constitutes an end in itself must be considered superior to those whose knowledge is directed towards some different end. He even claims that epistemological dignity is not only different from utility, but rather is opposed to it.

A short while later, in around the year 1268, Thomas Aquinas would argue along the same lines in his *De anima* commentary, wherein he takes particular care to issue a contrasting epistemological appraisal in respect of, first, the theoretical sciences and, second, their practical counterparts:

Circa primum sciendum est, quod omnis scientia bona est. [...] Inter bona autem quaedam sunt laudabilia, illa scilicet quae sunt utilia in ordine ad finem aliquem: laudamus enim bonum equum, quia bene currit; quaedam vero sunt etiam honorabilia, illa scilicet quae sunt propter seipsam; honoramus enim fines. In scientiis autem quaedam sunt practicae, et quaedam speculativae: et hae differunt, quia practicae sunt propter opus, speculativae autem propter seipsas. Et ideo scientiarum, speculativae, et bonae sunt et honorabiles, practicae vero laudabiles tantum²⁸.

²⁷ Albertus Magnus, *De anima*, ed. C. Stroick (Ed. Colon. VII/1), Aschendorff, Münster i.W. 1968, p. 3.

²⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri De anima*, ed. R.-A. Gauthier (Ed. Leon. XLV/1), Commissio Leonina – Vrin, Rome – Paris 1984, p. 4. Aquinas summarizes and refines Albert's account with the aid of Aristotle's distinction between «praise» (*laudabilis*) and «honor» (*honorabilis*) from the *Nicomachean Ethics* I, 12.

Like his confrère Albert, Aquinas argues strongly in favor of intrinsic finality as an essential criterion for the epistemological assessment of a science. In this sense, he claims that speculative sciences are, *per se*, superior to practical disciplines, since they are self-contained in relation to their ends, whereas practical sciences are determined by external finality, which latter fact is said to compromise their epistemological value. It is clear that Nicholas disagreed with this interpretation, an interpretation, however, which, in his own day and beyond, would prove to exert considerable influence²⁹. For the Franciscan friar, intrinsic finality was by no means a necessary criterion for a science's preeminence; on the contrary, its practical utility had likewise to be taken into account.

5. Concluding Remarks

The tensions between intrinsic and extrinsic finality which surface in Nicholas's *principium* are of both historical and systematic relevance, since they also characterize other *principia*. As was noted above, *De anima* I, 1 was an extremely common point of reference in comparative *principia*, both before and after Nicholas of Lyra³⁰. Many of these *principia*, in fact, established «utility» as a criterion for epistemological preeminence aiming to demonstrate the greater usefulness of

²⁹ See, for instance, in the fourteenth century, Guido Vernani da Rimini, *Expositio libri Aristotelis De anima*, web-edition by B. Mojsisch 2010: «[...] quaedam sunt bona laudabilia et quaedam sunt bona honorabilia. Bonum enim laudabile dicitur esse illud, quod non appetitur propter se ipsum, sed propter alterum, sicut iustitia et fortitudo et universaliter omnis virtus moralis. [...] Bonum vero honorabile dicitur esse illud, quod est bonum propter se ipsum et non appetitur propter alterum, cuius modi est felicitas, quae est ultimum bonum omnium humanorum. Tale autem bonum est scientia speculativa, quae non ordinatur ad aliquod opus exterius operatum». (URL = https://www.hs-augsburg.de/~harsch/Chronologia/Lspost14/GuidoVernani/gui_an1.html [access 22.09.2021]) In the fifteenth century, Albert's and Thomas's interpretation was followed by an author such as Nicolaus Tignosius, *In libros Aristotelis De anima commentarii*, Ex Biblioteca Medicea, Florence 1551, p. 5: «Tertio nota, quod bonorum quaedam sunt laudabilia, quaedam honorabilia. Prima sunt, quae non propter se, sed propter aliud expetuntur; ut hae quarum finis immediatus est practicus, et opus animae extrinsecum, intendentis non propter scire, sed propter operari solum repertae sunt [...] Honorabilia vero sunt, quae propter se ipsa expetuntur».

³⁰ In addition to the Biblical *principia* quoted above in n. 10, the passage from *De anima* is likewise found in prologues to and *principia* concerning the *Sentences*; see F. Fiorentino – C. Schabel, «Henry of Harclay's Prologue to his 'Sentences' Commentary, Question 1: Theology as a Science», *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales* 78 (2011) 97-159, at p. 158, and M. Morard, «Une certaine idée de la science sacrée: la 'Collatio super sacram scripturam' d'Armand de Belvèzer, O.P.», *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales* 73 (2006) 99-174, at pp. 162-162.

theological knowledge over its philosophical counterpart. This situation is evident not only in the case of Franciscan authors – such as Nicholas of Ockham and his *lectio* (ca. 1286) – but also in that of Dominican theologians – for instance, the Thomist Stephen of Besançon and his *principium* (1286) –, both of whom relied on the authority of Aristotle's *De anima* I, 1 while they introduced utility as an epistemological criterion³¹. Even though these authors did not explicitly refer to intrinsic and extrinsic finality, as had Nicholas, the use of utility as a criterion culminates in very nearly the same problems as does that of external finality, since it runs counter to the above interpretation of *De anima* I, 1. This fact is particularly clear if one considers Albert's account, which explicitly rejects utility as a positive epistemological criterion.

Against the foregoing background, Nicholas of Lyra's *principium* not only provides insights into this celebrated exegete's attitude towards philosophy. In this first respect, it has become evident that the Franciscan theologian considered philosophy, on account of its method, its subject matter and its scope, to be inferior to theology, as well as to be sterile, insofar as it is said to be incapable of transcending the theoretical sphere. In an additional respect, Nicholas's *principium* turns out to be an eloquent witness to the challenges confronting theologians in general as they endeavored to define their own science in relation to philosophy, for the reason that they attempted to accommodate within their discourse epistemological readings which did not always sit comfortably within a fresh domain.

³¹ For Nicholas, see the edition in Benson, «A Witness to the Early Reception...», cit., esp. pp. 38-39. For Stephen, see the edition in Spatz, *Principia...*, cit., esp. p. 246, as well as A. Fidora, «Stephen of Besançon's *principium in aula* (1286): An Epistemological Approach to the Relation between Philosophy and Theology», *Traditio* 76 (2021) 319-336.