

THOMAS AQUINAS AND THE EARLY FRANCISCAN SCHOOL ON THE AGENT INTELLECT

TOMAŠ NEJESCHLEBA

Univerzita Palackého Olomouc
Centrum pro práci s patristickými,
středověkými a renesančními texty
(Center for Patristic, Mediaeval
and Renaissance Texts)
PO BOX 87, Purkrabská 2,
CZ-771 87 Olomouc
nejes@ffnw.upol.cz

This paper deals with the differences between the concept of the agent intellect in Thomas Aquinas and in the early Franciscan school with a focus on St. Bonaventure. While according to Aquinas the agent intellect is the faculty of the human soul, in the thought of Alexander of Hales, John of La Rochelle and St. Bonaventure it has a double or even a triple meaning. In the Franciscan Masters the agent intellect is simultaneously considered as a faculty of the human soul but also as God himself and in John of La Rochelle as an angelic intelligence, too. This comparison could be useful in a new interpretation of the Condemnation of 1277 where the proposition on the separate agent intellect is also considered. It seems that the condemnation of this proposition 118 is in accord with the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas. What is actually being condemned here is the doctrine, partially held by the Franciscan friars, who are traditionally considered as initiators of the Condemnation.

The Condemnation of 1277 at Paris, the culmination of the doctrinal debates and conflicts in the faculty of Arts at the University, is one of the most momentous events in the history of medieval philosophy. The commission of theologians from the University and the Bishop of Paris, Étienne Tempier, who promulgated these 219 condemned philosophical and theological propositions, could scarcely have foreseen the historical meaning of this edict. Indeed the edict remains a subject of debate in modern medieval research and has been so from the very beginnings of the subject. The present state of research and critical

editions of medieval texts in the last quarter-century afford new perspectives and grounds for new interpretations of the Condemnation as a whole, of particular issues in it and of general questions related to it.¹ It is evident that a deep textual analysis is needed but that, on the other hand, the interpretation has to be made with respect to the wider historical context of particular issues. In this article I would like to deal with the background of one very important topic related to the Condemnation, i.e., the conception of the Agent Intellect. My task is not to describe the most notable aspect of the controversy concerning the Agent Intellect (the Thomistic arguments against Averroistic thought) but to treat the theme from another point of view. With respect to the Condemnation of 1277 I would like to compare the position of Thomas Aquinas, against whom other propositions of the Condemnation were directed, with the thought of Franciscan friars, who are believed to be the overall initiators of the Condemnation.

Aristotle in the third book of *De anima* writes about two types of human intellect. According to Aristotle, we can find in the physical universe a dichotomy of “matter” and “cause”. It is this “cause” which leads the matter from potentiality to actuality and the same type of the dichotomy can be disclosed in the intellect. Aristotle consequently distinguishes the intellect as being that is what it is “by virtue of becoming all things.” This is known as the potential or passive intellect. Conversely, the intellect that is what it is “by virtue of making all things” later became known as the active or agent intellect.² The theory of the agent intellect and its function takes Aristotelian noetics in very important directions. Thomas Aquinas also affirms the crucial role of this theory. The immaterial intellect cannot have direct cognition of material things which are only potentially thinkable. Aquinas claims therefore: “It is necessary to postulate a power, belonging to the intellect, to create actually thinkable objects by abstracting ideas from their material conditions. That is why we need to postulate an agent intellect.”³ Despite, and also because of, the importance of the

¹ Cf. K. Emery & A. Speer, ‘After the Condemnation of 1277: New evidence, new perspectives, and grounds of new interpretations’, in J.A. Aertsen, K. Emery & A. Speer (eds.), *Nach der Verurteilung von 1277 (Miscellanea Medievalia 28)*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin & New York, 2001, pp. 3–19.

² Aristotle, *De anima* 3,5,430a.

³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, 84, 1, concl. (ed. Marietti, Roma, 1939, p. 512): “Oportet igitur ponere aliquam virtutem ex parte intellectus, quae facit intelligibilia in actu per abstractionem specierum a conditionibus materialibus.” Cf. A. Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind*, Routledge, London & New York 1993, p. 46.

agent intellect in the noetics, the original theory of the agent intellect is characterised as “perhaps the most obscure and certainly the most discussed of all of Aristotle’s doctrines”⁴ and as the most difficult task in the exegesis of *De anima*.⁵ The problem is that it is not clear whether Aristotle considered the agent intellect to be an aspect of the human soul or an entity existing independently of man. If the latter proposition is true with what independent entity can we identify it?

The Greek commentators of Aristotle already had different notions of the status of the agent intellect. They differed in their identification of the agent intellect but concurred in the idea that it was something transcendental to the human soul. Furthermore, all Islamic philosophers in the Aristotelian tradition accepted the transcendent interpretation of the agent intellect. The Islamic philosophers also added a new aspect by integrating ideas of the transcendent agent intellect into cosmic schemes.⁶ In the late 12th century and the first half of the 13th century the most influential concept for Scholastic philosophers was that of Avicenna. Avicenna’s view was also that the agent intellect was an entity separated from the human soul. He elaborated further that the agent intellect was the last in the series of incorporeal intelligences, a spiritual substance that ruled the sublunar world and illuminated the human intellect by intelligible forms. For Avicenna the agent intellect was the active intellect of mankind, the source of abstract concepts and first principles of thought, which are received by the intellect, which is the part of human soul.⁷

Several theologians combined Avicenna’s theory with the Augustinian concept of illumination. At first I would like to mention Dominic Gundissalinus, the translator into Latin of many Greek and Arabic treatises concerning the soul. Although Gundissalinus accepted Avicenna’s typology of states of potential intellect (material intellect, in-

⁴ W.D. Ross (ed.), *Aristotle, Metaphysics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1924, p. 1, cxliii.

⁵ H.-J. Horn, *Studien zum dritten Buch der aristotelischen Schrift ‘De anima’*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1994, p. 100; Cf. F. Brentano, *Die Psychologie des Aristoteles, insbesondere seine Lehre vom Nous Poietikos. Nebst einer Beilage über das Wirken des aristotelischen Gottes*, Kirchheim, Mainz 1867; Unveränderter Nachdruck: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1967.

⁶ H. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on intellect — their cosmologies, theories of the active intellect and theories of human intellect*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992, p. 13.

⁷ Avicenna, *Liber de anima seu sextus de naturalibus*, I, 5 (ed. S. van Riet, Peeters, Louvain, 1972); cf. Davidson (*ibid.*: 74–126).

tellec*t in habitu*, intellect in effect), he substituted the agent intellect of Avicenna (or agent intelligence) for God Himself. There is nothing else that can illuminate the human intellect (in Aristotelian terminology potential intellect) other than God who, as a source of the light of our reason, is the principle of intelligible forms and thus the cause of human cognition.⁸ The identification of the agent intellect with God, and so with something separated from human soul, was a very usual interpretation of the problem of Aristotle's *De anima* III,5 among theologians of the 13th century. Such an interpretation was possible because the position of Avicenna and his Christian followers did not contradict the prevailing Christian orthodoxy as it did not imply the proposition of the non-existence of the individual and immortal human soul. For many 13th century theologians then, although the agent intellect was transcendent, the immanent part of human soul was not only passive potency but it became itself actual as an individual entity when illuminated by the agent intellect. The immortality of the human intellect would automatically follow from its being an incorporeal substance.

Completely different consequences arise from the theory of Averroes known as monopsychism. According to Averroes, not only the agent intellect but also the possible (precisely the material or receptive) intellect is considered transcendent. The agent intellect is the last of the celestial Intelligences and moves the lunar sphere; the material intellect receives intelligible forms abstracted by the agent intellect. These intellects are not united to individual man by their substances, but only by their activity.⁹ It is not important for the purposes of this discussion whether they constitute different separate substances or are identical for Averroes.¹⁰ Nonetheless, the implication is the same in both cases: spirituality and immortality do not belong to individuals, but only to the Intellect of human species. Only this doctrine, which means the unity of the possible intellect, not the unity of the agent intellect, jeopardises the fundamental dogmas of Christianity. I would like to emphasise this difference, which has often been confused.

⁸ J.T. Muckle, 'The Treatise *De anima* of Dominicus Gundissalinus', *Medieval Studies* 2, 1940, pp. 23–102.

⁹ *Averrois Cordubensis Commentarium Magnum in Aristotelis de Anima libros*, pp. 450–454 (ed. F.S. Crawford, Medieval Academy of America, Cambridge, Mass., 1953).

¹⁰ Cf. E. Gilson, *History of Christian philosophy in the Middle Ages*, Random House, New York, 1955, pp. 23–27; M. de Wulf, *Histoire de la philosophie médiévale*, Inst. sup. de philosophie, Louvain, 1934, vol. I, p. 307; F. Van Steenberghen, *Siger dans l'histoire de l'Aristotélisme*, Inst. sup. de philosophie, Louvain 1942, p. 376; Davidson (1992 : 295).

When we carefully examine the conception of the agent intellect of Thomas Aquinas we can see that it is quite different both from the tradition of Greek and Arab Commentators and from his Christian contemporaries. Aquinas was aware of this fact. In the second book of his *Commentary on Sentences* he writes that “almost all philosophers after Aristotle have concurred in the opinion that agent and possible intellects differ according to their substance and that the agent intellect is a separate substance.”¹¹ We can deduce from the words of Anselm of Canterbury, Aquinas continues, that an angel is the agent intelligence. Some Catholic writers corrected this opinion and stated that “God himself is an agent intellect” because: “The true light was that which, coming into the world, lightens every man.”¹² In the next lines Aquinas analyses the problem of the possible intellect and its relation to the agent intellect. In the conclusion he rejects the transcendent construction of the agent intellect: “I say together with Avicenna, that the possible intellect [...] is different in different individuals [...] But I add that also the agent intellect is different in different individuals.”¹³ Aquinas then locates the agent intellect into human soul and asserts that both, agent and possible intellect, are virtues or operations of one intellectual potency.

Despite of unusualness of this solution it had been proposed already by predecessors of Thomas Aquinas. Some authors had taken the doctrine of the semantic difference between the *quod est*, i.e., the ontological subject, and *quo est*, i.e., the form which provides the existence to it from the work of Boethius. In the first instance Philip the Chancellor applied it to the theory of the soul. He held in his *Summa de bono* that in the soul there are “two differences, one for receiving and another for acting” and that “matter is the principle of receiving and form the principle of acting.” These two differences, Philip continues, “are the agent intellect and the possible intellect.”¹⁴ The composition

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *In II. Sententiarum*, d. 17, q. 2, a. 1, resp.: “[...] in hoc fere omnes philosophi concordant post Aristotelem, quod intellectus agens et possibilis differunt secundum substantiam; et quod intellectus agens sit substantia quaedam separata.”

¹² Thomas Aquinas (*ibid.*): “[...] ipsum deum esse intellectum agentem [...] et hoc confirmant per hoc quod dicitur Joan. 1,9: erat lux vera, quae illuminat omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum.”

¹³ Thomas Aquinas (*ibid.*): “[...] dico cum Avicenna, intellectum possibilem [...] in diversis diversum esse [...] et superaddo etiam, intellectum agentem esse in diversis diversum.”

¹⁴ *Philippi Cancellarii Parisiensis Summa de bono*, IV, q. 1 (ed. N. Wicki, Francke, Bern 1985, vol. II, p. 264): “in anima autem sunt due differentiae, una ad recipiendum et al-

of the soul from the possible and the agent intellect is analogous to the composition of *quod est* and *quo est*. Consequently the agent intellect considered as *quo est* must be something immanent to the soul. Nevertheless he doesn't develop this analogy of the composition of *quod est* and *quo est* and the possible and agent intellect.

Thomas Aquinas modifies the formula of his predecessors and he understands the composition of *quod est* and *quo est* of the soul as of *forma* and *esse*. This is the basis of his metaphysics and is often expanded in his works.¹⁵ For this reason he had to find another argument for the immanence of the agent intellect. In the *Commentary of Sentences* he maintains that the theory of the separate agent intellect is not probable since then there would be no natural operation in the soul.¹⁶ Aquinas advanced number of arguments supporting his own view later in the *Summa contra gentiles*.¹⁷ But, having looked at the background and nature of Aquinas's views, let us pay attention to the early Franciscan school at this point.

There are very good reasons to compare the *Commentary* of Aquinas working within the Dominican Order with that of the Franciscan, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio. Firstly, both commentaries were written in the same period — at the beginning of the second half of the 13th century and at the same university. Secondly, Bonaventure is often considered to be the second the most influential thinker of this century after Thomas Aquinas. Thirdly and finally, the philosophical systems of these writers (and supposed friends) are judged by some observers to be radically different or even opposed.¹⁸ Etienne Gilson interpreted Bonaventure's philosophy as Augustinianism. Gilson also

tera ad faciendum. Ex quo accipitur quod habet materiam et formam, cum materia sit principium recipiendi, forma autem agendi; nam sunt eius heae differentiae intellectus agens et possibilis." Cf. R. Dales, *The problem of the rational soul in the thirteenth century*, Brill, Leiden, 1995, pp. 20–27.

¹⁵ See for example Thomas Aquinas, *De ente et essentia* 4 (ed. H.F. Dondaine, *Opera omnia*, XLIII, Editori di San Tommaso, Roma, 1976, pp. 376–378). Cf. Dales (1995: 109).

¹⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *In II. Sententiarum*, d. 17, q. 2, a. 1, concl.: "non enim videtur pobabile quod in anima rationali non sit principium aliquod quod naturalem operationem expelere possit, quod sequitur si ponatur unus intellectus agens, sive dicatur deus, vel intelligentia."

¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, II, 76 (ed. Leonis XIII, *Opera omnia*, XIII, Roma, 1918, pp. 480–488).

¹⁸ See R.J. Roch, 'The philosophy of St. Bonaventure — a controversy', *Franciscan Studies* 19, 1959, pp. 211–226; A. Speer, 'Bonaventure and the question of Medieval philosophy', *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 6, 1997, pp. 25–46.

argued that Bonaventure's work contained a radical repudiation of Aristotle and was, therefore, in opposition to the Aristotelianism of Aquinas. However, according to Gilson, Aquinas and Bonaventure concur with respect to the question what type of entity the agent intellect is. Bonaventure in his own *Commentary on Sentences* insisted, like Aquinas, that the agent intellect was a part of the human soul. Gilson saw the main difference between these thinkers in another point. Bonaventure writes, contrary to Aquinas (and according to Gilson, also contrary to Aristotle and principles of Aristotelian philosophy), that the possible intellect is not devoid of all actuality and that the agent intellect is not exempt from all potentiality. In Bonaventure's view then, the possible intellect is active in the preparation of intelligible notions and the agent intellect, whose function is to illuminate the possible intellect, is passive in receiving of these intelligible notions.¹⁹

Although Gilson's interpretation of Bonaventure's philosophy in general has been criticised many times and sometimes even attacked, his notion of the problem of what type of entity the agent intellect was, has been mostly accepted. Even Fernand Van Steenberghen, who had put forward a contrary interpretation of Bonaventure's philosophy to that of Gilson, insisted that Bonaventure's theory is very similar to that of Aquinas, though the thought of the Franciscan is not so developed Aristotelianism as that of the Dominican.²⁰ Another perspective comes from John Francis Quinn whose monograph on Bonaventure presents the Franciscan thinker as the author of a specific philosophical system. But also Quinn thinks that the position taken by Aquinas coincides in many ways with the position taken by Bonaventure and, most importantly for this discussion, that they agree in rejecting the idea of the transcendent agent intellect.²¹ Nevertheless, there are other interpretations that offer still different views on this problem. Some historians maintain that, on the one hand, Bonaven-

¹⁹ Bonaventura, *II. ententiarum*, dist. 24, pars. 1, art. 2, q. 4, (ed. Coll. S. Bonaventurae, *Opera omnia*, II, Quaracchi, 1885, p. 587): "Nec intellectus possibilis est pure passivus: habet enim supra speciem existentem in phantasmate se convertere et convertendo per auxilium intellectus agentis illam suscipere et iudicare. Similiter nec intellectus agens est omnino in actu: non enim potest intelligere aliud a se nisi adiuvetur a specie, quae abstracta a phantasmate intellectui habet uniri." Cf. E. Gilson, *Der heilige Bonaventura*, Hegner, Hellerau, 1929, pp. 500–502.

²⁰ F. Van Steenberghen, *Die Philosophie im 13. Jahrhundert*, Schöningh, München, 1977, pp. 222f.

²¹ J.F. Quinn, *The historical constitution of St. Bonaventure's philosophy*, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto, 1973, pp. 357–360.

ture locates the agent intellect as part of the human soul but, on the other hand, that he understands the agent intellect simultaneously as a separate substance, exactly it is God.²²

The problem is that Bonaventure's thinking in his *Commentary on Sentences* is not entirely clear. Bonaventure holds that the agent intellect is like a light, and that the possible intellect is that which is illuminated by the light. But no created substance has the power to illuminate the soul, so Bonaventure concludes that it cannot be considered as a separated agent intellect. Only God has that power, Bonaventure continues, as St. Augustine and Holy Scripture confirm it. God could be then understood as a separated agent intellect and this is "truth and in concord with the Catholic faith." After this statement follow the words *nihil est ad propositum* since God gives to man not only the potency of cognition but also the active power and so therefore the agent intellect is a part of the human soul.²³ This is a crucial point in the interpretation of Bonaventure's doctrine. Does it mean that God is not the agent intellect, as Gilson and others believe? Or does it mean that Bonaventure rejects the substantial difference of agent and possible intellect, with the exception that God is called agent intellect?

To answer this question we have to turn to another of Bonaventure's works. We can find only oblique references, which could support the latter interpretation. In the *Quaestiones disputatae de scientia Christi* in the part of arguments Bonaventure refers to the agent intellect considered as God but he does not return to this argument either in the conclusion or in the part of replies to the arguments.²⁴ In the *Collationes de septem donis Spiritus Sancti*, which is one of the first reactions to the Latin Averroism, Bonaventura confirms, on the one hand, the immanence of the agent intellect, on the other hand he stresses the illuminate activity of God which is necessary for the plenitude of the

²² See B.A. Luyckx, 'Die Erkenntnislehre Bonaventuras nach den Quellen dargestellt', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters* 23, 1923, p. 71; J.-M. Bissen, 'L'exemplarisme divin selon saint Bonaventure', *Études de Philosophie médiévale* 9, 1929, pp. 228–233.

²³ Bonaventura, *II. Sententiarum*, dist. 24, pars. 1, art. 2, q. 4, (ed. Coll. S. Bonaventurae, *Opera omnia*, II, Quaracchi, 1885, p. 587): "Iste autem modus dicendi, etsi verum ponat et fidei catholicae consonum, nihil tamen est ad propositum, quia, cum animae nostrae data sit potentia ad intelligendum, sicut aliis creaturis data est potentia ad alios actus, sic Deus, quamvis sit principalis operans in operatione creaturae, dedit tamen cuilibet vim activam per quam exiret in operationem propriam."

²⁴ Bonaventura, *Quaestiones disputatae de scientia Christi*, q. 4, arg. 32 (ed. Coll. S. Bonaventurae, *Opera omnia*, V, Quaracchi, 1891, p. 20).

human cognition. It seems that God is also being considered as the agent intellect but in the improper sense, i.e., insofar as He is the light illuminating the human intellect.²⁵ Having found little definitive evidence for Bonaventure's views on the agent intellect in his other work is there any we can learn from looking at Bonaventure's predecessors and teachers? The fundamental scope for an explanation could lie with those who influenced Bonaventure's thought.

Alexander of Hales, the founder of the early Franciscan school, in his so called *Summa theologica* argues that God would not have created the human soul without giving to it its own perfection of knowing. Hence the soul has its own agent and possible intellect. But Alexander then continues that the agent is said to act not because it knows all forms from the beginning, but because the First Agent illuminates it.²⁶ What does Alexander mean when he uses the term First Agent? This is again a subject of a controversy. According to Otto Keicher, Alexander means God as an agent intellect in the expression "First Agent" and therefore the Franciscan School holds two different doctrines of the agent intellect simultaneously.²⁷ However, according to Gilson, this term refers to just to the First Agent and not to the First Agent intellect.²⁸ Nevertheless despite Gilson's authority I would come down on Keicher's side because the traditional application of this term and the context of its use show that his interpretation is correct.

The doctrine of another Franciscan John of La Rochelle, who was a disciple of Alexander of Hales and a teacher of Bonaventure, is clearer in that its meaning does not permit such big differences in interpretation. When he asks "whether the agent intellect is separate from the substance of the soul, or is a *differentia* of the soul, and if it is separated, whether it is a created Intelligence (which is an angel) or uncreated

²⁵ Bonaventura, *Collationes de septem donis Spiritus Sancti*, c. 8 (ed. Coll. S. Bonaventurae, *Opera omnia*, V, Quaracchi, 1891, pp. 493–498).

²⁶ Alexander Halensis, *Summa theologica*, II., n. 372 (ed. Coll. S. Bonaventurae, Quaracchi, 1928, p. 451): "Ad id vero quod obicitur quod aliqua intelligibilia sunt supra intellectum et ita oportet quod cognitio fiat per agentem qui est supra intellectum: dicendum est quod agens non dicitur esse actu, quia omnes formas a principio intelligit, sed ab agente primo illuminatur, et iam non respectu omnium, sed respectu quarumdam formarum, et cum est illuminatus, perficit etiam possibilem illo modo; unde non est necesse ponere agentem separatim quoad omnia intelligibilia cognoscenda."

²⁷ O. Keicher, "Zur Lehre der ältesten Franziskanertheologen vom "intellectus agens"", in M. Baumgartner (ed.), *Abhandlung aus dem Gebiete der Philosophie und ihrer Geschichte*, Herder, Freiburg 1913, p. 176.

²⁸ E. Gilson, 'Pourquoi Saint Thomas a critiqué Saint Augustin', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 1, 1926, p. 87.

(which is God)” he answers all these questions in the affirmative. In John of La Rochelle’s view we can call the agent intellect both God and angel, and part of the soul with respect to different objects of cognition. God is the agent intellect for our knowledge of things higher than the soul, the angel is the agent intellect (in the sense of revelation or instruction) for our knowledge of things on the same level as the soul and, finally, the agent is a light innate in the soul for our knowledge of things that lie within the soul or below it.²⁹ I would like to point out that a very close relationship can be observed between the treatises of John of La Rochelle (*Tractatus de multiplicis potentiarum animae, Summa de anima*) and *Summa theologica* of Alexander of Hales with respect to the doctrine of the agent intellect. John of La Rochelle expresses his own view on the agent intellect as God almost in the same words as we find in the *Summa theologica*, i.e., he describes God as the First Agent that illuminates the soul.³⁰ From my point of view this fact could, for one thing, confirm the interpretation we adduced above and for another be a new fundament for the reinterpretation of the problem of the authenticity of Alexander’s *Summa*. Detailed analysis is needed on condition that new editions of still unedited works of both Franciscans will be released.

We can conclude this part of the paper with the hypothesis that these two Franciscans consider the agent intellect as a potency of the human soul, but at the same time they tend to understand God also as the agent intellect for he illuminates the soul. This view can be deduced from the works of Alexander of Hales and is made clear by John of La Rochelle, who adds that the angel can also be called the agent intellect. The doctrine of Bonaventure is not so evident but there is a good chance that he held the same view as his teachers. In addition, the doctrine on the double-meaning of the agent intellect is characteristic for other Franciscans too, and especially in the work of the disciples of

²⁹ Jean de La Rochelle, *Tractatus de divisione multiplici potentiarum animae*, II, 21, (ed. P. Michaud-Quantin, *Textes Philosophiques du Moyen Âge LX*, Vrin, Paris, 1964, p. 91): “Dicendum igitur quod, si intellectus agens dicatur omnis intelligentia agens respectu humani intellectus possibilis, sic intelligentia divina, sive lux increata, et intelligentia angelica et intelligentia humana, sive lux anime innata, intellectus agens communiter dicitur, sed respectu diversorum cognoscibilium.”

³⁰ Alexander: “dicendum est, quod agens non dicitur esse actu, quia omnes formas a principio intelligit, sed ab agente primo illuminatur, et iam non respectu omnium, sed respectu quarumdam formarum”; John of La Rochelle: “[...] dicimus, quod agens intellectus [...] recipiens illuminationes a Primo [...] sed non semper nec respectu quorumlibet cognoscibilium retinet rationem agentis [...]”

Bonaventure. According to John Peckham, the separate agent intellect is the divine intellect, which is the same as the lumen. But there is also the active power of the soul that brings about the actual understanding, a phenomenon which Peckham calls the created agent intellect.³¹ Another Franciscan, William of Baglione, whose treatises launched an attack against Averroes, held a position very similar to that of John of La Rochelle, namely that there are two agent intellects in the proper sense, God and a part of human soul. Even an angel could be called the agent intellect but only in the improper sense.³²

The reason for the double-meaning of the agent intellect lies in the Franciscans' characteristic and well-known attitude towards theology and philosophy. They tried to reconcile principles of Aristotelian philosophy with the Augustinian fundament of theology. With respect to noetics this means that they had to unify the Aristotelian theory of abstraction and the doctrine of the agent intellect, which Aristotle had already compared to light, with the Augustinian theory of illumination and the division of the human intellect into two faces, the higher, which is illuminated from God, and the lower, which is not illuminated.

Thomas Aquinas knew well these attempts at reconciliation. In the *Summa theologiae* he wrote "even supposing the existence of such a separate active intellect, it would be necessary to assign to the human soul some power participating in that superior intellect, by which power of human soul makes things actually intelligible."³³ But he claims that only this power of the human soul could be called the agent intellect. God is not the agent intellect, because he illuminates as a universal cause. In the treatise *De unitate intellectus* Aquinas explains this position. At first he maintains that the agent intellect could be some kind of separate substance and the same for everybody, "for nothing absurd seems to follow from several things being perfected by one agent." But "this is not Aristotle's intention—he holds that the agent intellect is in

³¹ Cf. L.J. Bowmann, 'The development of the doctrine of the Agent Intellect in the Franciscan School of the thirteenth century', in: *The Modern Schoolman* 50, 1973, p. 266.

³² William of Baglione, *De unitate intellectus* (ed. I. Brady, 'Background of the Condemnation of 1270: Master William of Baglione, O.F.M', *Franciscan Studies* 8, 1970, p. 38.

³³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, 79, 4, concl. (ed. B.M. de Rossi, Marietti, Torino & Roma, 1939, p. 514): "Sed dato quod sit aliquis talis intellectus agens separatus, nihilominus tamen oportet ponere in ipsa anima humana aliquam virtutem ab illo intellectu superiori participatam, per quam anima facit intelligibilia in actu [...]."

the soul.”³⁴ We can conclude that for Aquinas the reason to reject the transcendent agent intellect and to insist on its immanence rests on his conviction that this was Aristotle’s position.

In the light of this conclusion the Condemnation of 1277 seems to contain certain elements without a satisfactory explanation. Condemned thesis 118 says: “that the agent intellect is a separate substance higher than the possible intellect, and that with respect to the substance, potency and operation it is separated from the body, and that it is not a form of human body.”³⁵ It is obvious that the condemnation of this proposition is in accord with the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas. Furthermore, what is actually being condemned here is the doctrine, partially held by the Franciscan friars, who are traditionally considered as initiators of the Condemnation.

³⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *De unitate intellectus*, 4 (ed. H.F. Dondaine, *Opera omnia*, XLIII, Roma, 1976, p. 307b): “nihil enim videtur inconueniens sequi, si ab uno agente multa perficiantur, quemadmodum ab uno sole perficiuntur omnes potentie visive animalium ad videndum. Quamvis etiam hoc non sit secundum intentionem Aristotilis, qui posuit intellectum agentem esse aliquid in anima.”

³⁵ *Enquête sur les 219 articles condamnés à Paris le 7 Mars 1277*, art. 118 (ed. R. Hissette, *Philosophes Médiévaux*, XXII, Paris 1977, p. 193): “Quod intellectus agens est quaedam substantia separata superior ad intellectum possibilem; et quod secundum substantiam, potentiam et operationem est separatus a corpore, nec est forma corporis hominis.”