

Thomas' Aquinas and John's of Damascus Readings of Aristotle: an Indicative Suggestion of the Differences

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Abstract

The key in order to understand the differences between the interpretations of Aristotle by Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and John of Damascus (675-749) lays, as we propose it in our essay, to their contapunctual interpretations of the aristotelian notion of movement and its relation to Being. The relation between substance and concrete form, also of potentiality and activity, are seen here in opposite manners and following opposite spiritual needs or primacies. John understands Being as the eschatological end of movement and, thus, gives to movement a fundamental ontological quality. On the contrary, Thomas' thought is protological, i.e., for him truth is prior to any kind of movement, which can thus have only secondary meaning. Following the deeper perspectives of the augustinian theology, Thomas understands God mainly as a substance, a motionless, self-referential entity, which creates movement from inside its essential closure, whereas for John God is primarily a Father, i.e. a reference and a movement.

For John it is only through the movement that the unity of the substance is defined and articulated, which means that the substance is already essentially in movement - the ec-stastic movement is the existential modus of the substance, which can never be thought of in separate. For that reason, fundamental theological and philosophical terms such as nature, freedom or subjectivity were developed in different directions by the eastern and the western Christian Church, each following a different possibility of interpreting the aristotelian metaphysics of movement.