The preceding essay on Aristotle’s theories of memory and recollection produced evidence to support the conclusion that his views on these subjects differ substantially from all present-day theories. Several corollaries followed, and I investigated some of them in the preceding essay. But there is another very basic conclusion which was not discussed thoroughly: Aristotle must be read in the original Greek, or at the very least the reader will have to know some Greek, if the text is not accompanied by a commentary. Otherwise, it simply is not possible to grasp the distinctions that Aristotle makes concerning remembering, recalling, and recollecting. This has consequences for our translations and understanding of the text, but it posed even more severe problems for the medieval Latin interpretations of Aristotle, which are the primary subject of investigation in this essay.

At least from the 12th century the medieval thinkers often took their point of departure simply from an Aristotelian text when examining a scientific subject: Literal commentaries and question commentaries on Aristotle, as well as disputations of different kinds, often spurred by remarks or discussions in the Aristotelian treatises, all became part of an elaborate attempt to work scientifically with subjects, some of which are nowadays considered scientific, some philosophical. True,
Christian tenets were important, but so was rational argument, and for this the schoolmen looked to Aristotle, as the philosopher who had treated a number of subjects by using reason. But, contrary to what has often been stated before scholasticism became the subject of more careful studies, the schoolmen did not simply accept Aristotelian tenets on authority: since his views were set forth by rational argument, they were (preferably) also to be tested by such means, and even though Aristotle was usually right, the medievals were well aware that he did sometimes commit errors. That is, an Aristotelian view should, according to the medievals, be assumed to be correct, but it was still to be thoroughly discussed and tested. If it did not easily accord with general human intuition (or Christian faith), one should examine whether or not Aristotle might have meant something else, which was not immediately conveyed by the wording; for instance, one or more words might be interpreted as ambiguous. But if such an interpretation could not prove that a particular theory by Aristotle was in accordance with e.g., another (and better) argument, then Aristotle’s view was simply not accepted. I think it can easily be seen that this kind of scientific method will have to make very careful and sophisticated use of Aristotle’s work, and thus it is to be expected, a priori, that the thinkers of this period developed some of the historically most interesting scientific theories on an Aristotelian foundation. Whether this holds true for the concepts of memory and recollection I will examine in the present essay.

The Scope of the Investigation

Almost 2,400 years have passed since Aristotle, and he is the most studied philosopher of all times. It is therefore clear that my investigation of the Aristotelian tradition must necessarily be selective, and some discussion of the criteria for choosing a particular period and a particular group of thinkers for study is called for.

It is no easy matter to determine exactly when the Aristotelian theories of nature, including his theories of memory and recollection, lost their influence. Contemporary philosophy and natural science trace their beginnings to the 14th and 15th centuries with the complete victory of modern natural science in the 17th century. Even though Aristotelianism cannot be declared dead from the 17th century,1 it can reasonably be said that Aristotelian influence on natural science and phi-

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