AQUINAS’S COMMENTARY ON THE *METAPHYSICS*

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**INTRODUCTION**

As is known, Thomas Aquinas set out to comment on Aristotle’s works rather late in his career. His first Aristotelian commentary, the *Sententia Libri De Anima*, dates back to 1267/68 when Aquinas was still in Rome to direct the recently founded Dominican *studium*. \(^1\) At least at the beginning, Aquinas’s activity as an Aristotelian commentator had a rather “private” character and was mainly prompted by Thomas’s desire to enhance his knowledge of Aristotle’s thought and philosophical jargon. \(^2\) Even though polemical references to Averroes are not missing in Aquinas’s commentaries, it is unlikely that the Dominican Master’s intent was to build up a body of commentaries in order to replace Averroes’s standard interpretation of Aristotle. Progressively, however, Aquinas’s works gained in popularity, circulation, and importance so as to become a point of reference for any subsequent interpretation of Aristotle’s texts. Thus, Aquinas’s commentaries came soon to be regarded by both adversaries and followers as standard expositions of Aristotle’s doctrine, to be compared to or set against Averroes’s exegetical corpus.

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\(^2\) This view is defended in particular by René-Antoine Gauthier in the introduction to his edition of the *Sententia Libri De anima*. See Sancti Thomae de Aquino *Opera Omnia*, vol. 45.1 (Rome-Paris, 1984), pp. 288*–94*. Gauthier also advances the suggestion that Aquinas’s activity as a commentator may have served, at least at the beginning, as a preparation for the drafting of the different parts of the *Summa Theologiae*. According to James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas d’Aquino: His Life, Thought and Work*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C., 1983), pp. 280–85, Aquinas regarded it as one of his apostolic duties to provide students and young professors with reliable expositions of Aristotle’s philosophy, which could be shown to be fundamentally in agreement with the main tenets of Christian faith. There is no evidence, however, that Aquinas’s Aristotelian commentaries were drafted for anyone but Aquinas himself. It must also be recalled that it was not one of his institutional duties, as a theology master, to teach and write on Aristotle. This, of course, does not exclude the possibility that Aquinas’s commentaries may have circulated and rapidly become known to teachers and students. On the different opinions concerning Aquinas’s motivations for commenting on Aristotle, see Torrell, *Initiation*, pp. 237–39.
The *Sententia super Metaphysicam*, the longest and arguably the most important of Aquinas's Aristotelian commentaries, was drafted during Aquinas's second teaching in Paris (Autumn 1268–Spring 1272). The *Sententia* falls into 12 books and so contains also an exposition of Book K. In the absence of a critical edition of the text, many details about its composition remain uncertain. Aquinas is likely to have started his writing in the academic year 1270–71. Since Aquinas became acquainted with William of Moerbeke’s revision of the *Media* and translation of Book K in the second half of 1271, the work must have been completed towards the very end of Aquinas’s teaching in Paris or, possibly, in the first months of his staying in Naples. Although Moerbeke’s revision and translation is used throughout Aquinas’s commentary as the main basis for his exposition of Aristotle’s text, references are made also to other versions of the *Metaphysics*, including the *Media*, the *Vetus*, and the *Vetustissima*. This phenomenon is particularly apparent in the first books of the commentary. Thus, the hypothesis has been advanced that Aquinas may have revised the *Sententia* after his acquaintance with Moerbeke’s new version.

The critical edition should also shed some light on the nature of Aquinas’s sources. The presence of Avicenna and Averroes, whom Aquinas explicitly quotes and criticizes, is beyond dispute. Albertus Magnus’s commentary is never referred to, nor does it seem to be present implicitly in Aquinas’s exposition. Work still needs to be done on the possible presence of other 13th-century commentators such as Adam of Buckfield, Riccardus Rufus, or Geoffrey of Aspall. The general impression, however, is that Aquinas proceeds rather autonomously in his appropriation of

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