

HAPPINESS AND KNOWLEDGE IN SOME MASTERS OF ARTS BEFORE 1250

An analysis of some commentaries on the Book I of *Nicomachean Ethics*

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The masters of Arts were immersed in an incredibly rich intellectual environment from which they took many tools but to which they also contributed. Although they cultivated the literal genre of commentary, it does not mean that they only repeated the theories of others. Usually, those commentaries are original constructions that almost use the commented work as an excuse to expose a personal doctrine. The case of the masters of Arts is eloquent. The commentaries on the *Ethica Noua* (the Latin translation of book I of *Nicomachean Ethics*)¹ include contents that exceed largely those of the first book of *Nicomachean Ethics*. Even Robert Kilwardby² (he was then a master of Arts at Paris), who wanted to keep an interpretation as near as possible to the Aristotelian text, had to take the time to refute all the elaborations that the masters drew from the lines of the text. This fact allows to consider the writings of the masters independently from their Aristotelian sources because they state there theories sufficiently independent in themselves.

Happiness and knowledge had a close relationship among the masters of Arts that wrote during the first half of the thirteenth century. Happiness is considered by the masters through the first book of *Nicomachean Ethics* known as the *Ethica Noua*; it is always linked with knowledge (as it is the most perfect activity of the soul) and so with intellectual virtues. Although in that book the intellectual virtues are not considered profoundly, the masters are capable of many elaborations in that respect. That is possible thanks to the background of what has been called the *Greek-Arab Peripatetism*³, which had enriched the western corpus of philosophical literature through a number of translations from Greek as well as from Arab.

Happiness as knowledge of the First

As in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is stated, the masters first identify happiness with the highest good (*summum bonum*). As the highest good, happiness is a union with the First that is Itself happiness⁴. This is a curious definition because here

¹ Before 1250, the *Nicomachean Ethics* was studied in the west following two partial translations: the *Ethica Noua* (dated around 1220 included book I) and the *Ethica Vetus* (dated near the end of the twelfth century, included books II and III). Cfr. R. A. Gauthier, "Notes sur les débuts (1225-1240) du premier 'averroïsme'", *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, t. 66, 1982, pp. 321-374.

² Robertus Kilwardby, *Expositio super Ethica Noua*, in Cambridge, Peterhouse 206, f. 285ra-295rb.

³ Cfr. A. de Libera, *La Philosophie Médiévale*, Paris, PUF (Collection Premier Cycle), 1993.

⁴ Cf. Lafleur, *Le "Guide de l'étudiant" d'un maître anonyme de la Faculté des Arts*

happiness ends up with two main meanings : it is mainly God itself or the First Being or the First Cause⁵; also, it is related to humans for happiness emerges by getting joined or united with the First (God)⁶. But what kind of union is this? This union is made by the relationship of knowledge or contemplation or participation of our soul in the First. Of course, some masters consider this union as contemplation⁷ and others as participation⁸. Notably, an optimism of the possibility of this union is always kept, perhaps as a result of the possibility of knowing separate being such as God and angels that came from speculative sciences⁹.

An analysis of the union with the first is necessary. It has already been presented as a topic of the philosophy of the *Greek-Arab Peripatetism*¹⁰; the first read-

de Paris au XIIIe siècle, Édition critique provisoire du ms. Barcelona, Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, Ripoll 109, ff. 134ra-158va, avec la collaboration de J. Carrier, Québec, Faculté de Philosophie, Université Laval, 1992, § 92: "Item queritur utrum felicitas de qua hic agitur sit causata. Et uidetur quod non. Probat enim hic auctor quod illa est bonum perfectissimum. Sed nichil est tale nisi Primum. Ergo hec felicitas est ut Primum; ergo est incausata. — Ad hoc dicimus quod felicitas dicitur esse bonum perfectissimum inter bona participabilia uel humana. Et sic intelligi hic Aristotiles. Primum autem non est participabile in sui essentia, cum sit simplicissimum. Propter hoc illud quod dicitur hic, intelligitur de felicitate causata".

⁵ The 'First' is a term taken from the *Liber de Causis* which was by that time considered to belong to Aristotle. Cfr. Pseudo-Aristote, *Liber de Causis*, éd. établie à l'aide de 90 manuscrits, avec introduction et notes par Adriaan Pattin, Leuven, Uitgave van Tijdschrift voor filosofie, 1966. On the reception of the *Liber de Causis* see C. D'Ancona Costa, "Philosophus in libro De Causis". Le *Liber de Causis* comme ouvrage aristotélicien dans les commentaires de Roger Bacon, du ps. Henri de Gand et du ps. Adam de Bocfeld", in *Recherches sur le Liber de causis*, Paris, Vrin, 1995, pp. 195-228.

⁶ R. A. Gauthier, "Le cours sur l'*Ethica Nova* d'un maître ès arts de Paris (1235-1240)", *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, XLII, Paris, 1975, p. 115: "uirtus secundum quam attenditur uita contemplatiua est medium quo nobis unitur felicitas". See also *infra*, p. 107.

⁷ R. A. Gauthier, *Le cours...*, *op. cit.*, p. 107: "Iterum, felices operantur, scilicet in aspiciendo primum et cognoscendo; unde cognoscere primum et diligere sunt opera alicuius cum habet felicitatem. Et hoc modo intelligit auctor cum dicit quod ipsi dicebant quod uita et operatio sunt idem felicitati". As it becomes evident, there is here a mixture of properly Aristotelian components and Neo-platonic components. On the Neo-platonic nuances of the theories of the masters of Arts see Lafleur Cl. (avec la collaboration de J. Carrier), "Une figure métissée du platonisme médiéval: Jean le Page et le prologue de son commentaire (vers 1231-1240) sur l'*Isagoge* de Porphyre", in Bjarne Melkevic and Jean-Marc Narbonne (Editors), *Une Philosophie dans l'Histoire. Hommages à Raymond Klibansky*, Québec, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2000, pp. 105-160.

⁸ Cl. Lafleur, *Le Guide...*, § 93: "Ad hoc dicendum quod in ueritate in quantum est a parte Primi unumquodque est natum participare Ipsum, sed ex parte recipientium potest esse defectus. Nam nata est enim felicitas inesse diligentibus solum et affectantibus per amorem et cognitionem. Huiusmodi autem, que sic affectant Primum et diligunt, <sunt> solum due substantie, scilicet homo et angelus".

⁹ A remarkable work on this topic has been done by Cl. Lafleur avec la collaboration de J. Carrier, "Abstraction, séparation et tripartition de la philosophie théorétique: quelques éléments de l'arrière-fond farabien et artien de Thomas d'Aquin, *Super Boetium De Trinitate*, question 5, article 3", *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales*, 67, 2 (2000), pp. 249-269. See also, Cl. Lafleur, *Dieu, la théologie et la métaphysique au milieu du XIIIe siècle selon des textes épistémologiques artiens et thomasiens*, Québec, Faculté de Philosophie, Université Laval (Cahiers du Laboratoire de Philosophie Ancienne et Médiévale de la Faculté de Philosophie de l'Université Laval, XIII), 2003.

¹⁰ R. A. Gauthier, "Le traité *De Anima et de potencis eius* d'un maître ès arts (vers 1225)", *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 66 (1982), pp. 3-55.

ers of the peripatetic philosophy, recently translated (during the twelfth century), had not interpreted the agent intellect as separated; instead, they used to consider the agent intellect as a part of the human soul¹¹ capable of uniting with the source of all knowledge that is God. Although many masters claim this theory, they have different ways of organizing the soul and different ways of getting united to God¹². As the intellectual knowledge is the most perfect capability of man, this union remains a kind of intellectual knowledge. The intellect has an intuition of the First, which would be nothing else but a union of the intellect with its source, what in some cases is even considered as an illumination (as is the case of the *Commentary of Paris*)¹³. This state of union with the First in an incomparable plenitude is a knowledge which entails a delight, an affection or simply love¹⁴.

This knowledge of God involves, as has been said, the possibility of knowledge of separate beings, which has been already considered by some masters in the classification of sciences¹⁵. They call "separation" the intellectual intuition of separate beings (i.e. the angels and God). Why would not it be then possible happiness in this life, if the knowledge of God is possible?

This knowledge of God is naturally related to intellectual virtues according to the masters of Arts. Although there was almost no place in book one of *Nicomachean Ethics* for intellectual virtues, the masters devoted time and space to search what they could deduce from the brief lines they had available. Considering that happiness and knowledge had such a tight link, intellectual virtues must have an important place in defining and achieving happiness. An example of this attitude can be found in the *Divisio Scientiarum* of Arnoul of Provence¹⁶ around 1245.

¹¹ *Ibid.* See also the structure of the soul in the *Commentary of Paris*: R. A. Gauthier, *Le cours...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-102.

¹² An example can be found in Arnulfi Provincialis, Magistri artium Parisiensis (c. 1250), *Divisio scientiarum*, in Cl. Laffleur, *Quatre introductions à la philosophie au XIII^e siècle*, Montréal, Institut d'études médiévales/Paris, Vrin, 1988, see specially the *Philosophia Moralis*, p. 333, 506 – p. 336, 560.

¹³ *Commentary of Paris*, Paris, Bibl. Nat., 3804a, f. 153ra (the orthography of the manuscript is kept): "Et intellectus agens plus recipit illuminationem a primo quam possibilis. Similiter est a parte partis motiue: in motiua enim parte anime humane, que uocatur pars desideratiua, est duplex uirtus seu pars, scilicet suprema et inferiora et suprema pars plus illuminatur a primo quam inferior pars. Et quia illa suprema pars maxime illuminatur a lumine primi influente". Also see R. A. Gauthier, *Le traité De anima et de potentiis eius ...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 53-54: "hic notandum est quod alique forme sunt in intellectu possibili quas non abstrahit intellectus agens a fantasmatis, set anima acquirit eas per rectam operationem, sicut sunt iusticia, prudentia; et alique sunt quas acquirit per superiorem illuminationem, ut quedam que intelliguntur de Deo et diuino modo".

¹⁴ R. A. Gauthier, *Le cours...*, *op. cit.*, p. 107, also Arnulfi Provincialis, *Divisio scientiarum*, *op. cit.*, p. 336, also Anonymi Magistri Artium, *Commentarium super Ethica noua et uetus*, Florence, Bibl. Naz., conv. sopp. G 4 .853, f. 4ra, and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Lat. misc., c. 71, f. 4rb: "Beatitudo enim nominat summum bonum in quantum habet esse in nobis per cognitionem et affectum" (ed. of Jean Clermont-Drolet).

¹⁵ See Jean le Page, Prologue *Sicut dicit philosophus*, in Cl. Laffleur, "Abstraction, séparation ...", *op. cit.*, p. 266: "Vno enim modo appellantur abstractio existentia alicuius extra materiam quod numquam fuit in materiam nec est nec erit, et talis abstractio proprio uocabulo 'separatio' nuncupatur".

¹⁶ Arnulfi Provincialis, *Divisio scientiarum*, *op. cit.*, p. 335, 540 – 336, 560: "Bonum autem illud duplex est: quoddam enim est quod est ab homine operabile et per operationes sibi unibile, et huiusmodi bonum est uirtus; aliud est bonus quod non est ab homine operabile set tamen per bonas operationes sibi unibile, quod est felicitas, de qua

The case of Arnoul of Provence is peculiar, for he considers *fronesis* (this strange orthography is kept as it corresponds to the strangeness of the concept of *fronesis*) as the top intellectual virtue, a kind of "mystical virtue"¹⁷ that is the result of a rising hierarchy of virtues that ends in an *informatio*¹⁸ accompanied with an intense affection¹⁹. This "information" is a knowledge received directly from the Creator to whom is felt a great inflammation of our soul. Knowledge and love of God, together and in the highest scale, is what Arnoul calls *fronesis*.

The *Commentary of Paris* as well considers that the knowledge of the practical intellect is "with affection"²⁰; in one of its definition of happiness he also includes the combination of virtue and knowledge²¹. The commentary known as *Pseudo-Peckham Commentary* also uses this formula²². In their first researches on the intellectual virtues, the masters of Arts achieved a complicated model in which knowledge and moral were tightly related. The question to ask now is whether the masters of the first half of thirteenth century had conceived within their commentaries the elements of an original philosophy.

The division of intellectual work

The theories that have been stated must get a contextualization. This epistemological-ethical optimism must be highlighted against the context of the teaching duties of the masters of Arts. They were not supposed to teach theology or metaphysics because some prohibitions of Aristotle's works were in force at that time²³. The optimism around the intellectual intuition of separate beings seems to have been noted by Thomas Aquinas, always awake²⁴. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why

determinatur in *Noua Ethica*. Bonum autem quod est uirtus diuiditur secundum diuersum respectum anime quo inclinatur ad regendum corpus uel quo erigitur ad contemplandum Deum. Nam intellectus humani duplex ponitur facies, superior scilicet et inferior, secundum quam diuersos habitus uirtutum sibi acquirit. Nam secundum quod per partem superiorem intuetur Creatorem absque multa et magna affectione, informatur habitus uirtutis qui dicitur intelligentia; secundum uero quod ulterius per affectionem extenditur et affectus intenditur, informatur secundo habitu uirtutis qui dicitur sapientia, quasi *sapere condita*; secundum autem quod per intensum affectum et anorem inflammatur ut Illi, quantum possibile est, se conformet, acquiritur ei habitus uirtutis qui dicitur *fronesis*, id est 'informatio'. Et isti tres habitus anime uocantur uirtutes intellectuales".

¹⁷ R. A. Gauthier, "Arnoul de Provence et la doctrine de la *fronesis* vertu mystique suprême", in *Revue du Moyen Âge Latin*, 19 (1963), pp. 129-170.

¹⁸ This word *informatio* is used mainly in translations from the Arab, to mean an intellectual intuition of a separate being. Cfr. *supra*, n. 16. An example of that is provided in the Avicenna Latinus, *Liber de Anima seu sextus de naturalibus*, édition critique de la traduction latine médiévale par S. Van Riet, Louvain, Peeters/Leiden, Brill, 1972, I, p. 94, 15-16: "Sed uirtus contemplativa est uirtus quae solet informari a forma uersali nuda a materia".

¹⁹ Arnoul de Provence, *op. cit.*, p. 336, l. 544-550 see text above n. 11.

²⁰ R. A. Gauthier, *Le Cours...*, p. 102: "Similiter dicendum quod pars intellectus practici superior desiderat et appetit et cognoscit, set ista cognitio est cum affectu".

²¹ R. A. Gauthier, *Le Cours...*, p. 116. This is the definition according to philosophers: "Et sic patet quod uita que est idem felicitati predicatur de uita contemplatiua in quantum uita contemplatiua est circa cognitionem sine fantasmate et uirtutem que est circa partem superiorem intellectus practici siue uirtutis desideratiue".

²² See *supra*, n. 14.

²³ On this context see: L. Bianchi, *Censure et liberté intellectuelle à l'Université de Paris (XIIIe-XIVe siècles)*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1999.

²⁴ Cf. Lafleur, *Dieu, la théologie et la métaphysique au milieu du XIIIe siècle selon*

he started worrying about how to limit the knowledge of God²⁵. His genius would be able to stop this optimism about the achievement of the knowledge of God in this life, by considering that the direct intuition of separate beings (including God) is not possible for human beings in this life²⁶.

The power of the soul is limited to what it can have from the senses, and that would be the science possible for speculative sciences²⁷. As for the knowledge of God, it would be possible only after death for the blessed²⁸, or by the traces that we can find in the sacred scriptures²⁹. Should then the masters of Arts resign themselves to give up the knowledge of God? Well, they eventually had to.

des textes épistémologiques artiens et thomasiens, Québec, Faculté de Philosophie, Université Laval (Cahiers du Laboratoire de Philosophie Ancienne et Médiévale de la Faculté de Philosophie de l'Université Laval, XIII), 2003.

²⁵ Sancti Thomae de Aquino, *Expositio super librum Boethii De Trinitate*, ad fidem codicis autographi nec non ceterorum codicum manu scriptorum recensuit Bruno Decker, Leiden, Brill, 1965, Q. 5 and 6.

²⁶ Cfr. *ibid.*, Q. 6 a. 4 (Vtrum hoc [scilicet : formam diuinam inspicere] possit fieri per uiam alicuius scientie speculatiue) and also Q. 5 art. 4 (Vtrum diuina scientia sit de his quae sunt sine materia et motu).

²⁷ Cfr. *ibid.*, Q. 6, a. 4.

²⁸ Cfr. *ibid.*, Q. 6, a. 4 ad 3um.

²⁹ Cfr. *ibid.*, Q. 6, a. 3.