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Was Aquinas Right when He Claimed that Avicbron Departed from Aristotle?

ABSTRACT: Thomas Aquinas deals in *De substantiis separatis* with the excellence of holy angels. Therefore, he began with man's earliest conjectures about the angels. In this way, he was in a position to accept whatever he found that agreed with faith, and refuted whatever was opposed to Catholic teaching. Among opinions of the other thinkers, an opinion of Avicbron on spiritual substances from his work *Fons vitae* was included by Aquinas. The reason was that according to Avicbron the spiritual substances are composed of matter and form. Aquinas refuted opinion of Avicbron because it departed from opinions of Plato, and of Aristotle. What does it mean in detail is a topic of this paper. Its author is going to compare both Aquinas's and Avicbron's arguments to give an answer to a question if Aquinas was right when he claimed that Avicbron departed from Aristotle's hylomorphism.

KEY WORDS: Aquinas • Avicbron • hylomorphism • Neoplatonism • separated substances

Introduction

Thomas Aquinas deals with the excellence of the holy angels in his work *De substantiis separatis*. Therefore "we ought to begin with man's earliest conjectures about the angels. In this way, we shall be in a position to accept whatever we find that agrees with faith, and refute whatever is opposed to Catholic teaching". Among opinions of his predecessors Aquinas included also Avicbron's opinion from *Fons vitae*, according to which spiritual substances are also composed of matter and form. It resulted from Avicbron's argument that if God created everything from the matter and the form by his will and the spiritual substances among it, then these are also composed of the matter and the form. Avicbron did not justify his opinion through the direct reference to Aristotle, he just repeatedly

¹ *De substantiis separatis. Treatise on separate substances* by Thomas Aquinas, translated by F.J. Lescoe, Weist Hartford CN: Saint Joseph College, 1959. Edited and html-formated by J. Kenny, P. P. [online] [2017-07-11] available on: <http://www.dhsprory.org/thomas/SubstSepar.htm>.

mentioned Plato among other eminent philosophers instead. Avicbron is considered the greatest representative of Neoplatonized Aristotelism in the history of Medieval Jewish philosophy for his interpreting creation as a form flowing out and down to a matter, namely an emanation. Describing the being, he united Neoplatonist terminology with categories of the Peripatetic tradition which was developing in the philosophy of the Islamic world.

Aquinas also accepted the claim that God created everything including separated substances. However, the Scripture implies that angels, i.e., the separated substances, are incorporeal and immaterial, therefore it cannot be true that the separated substances are composed of the matter and the form. Hence, not everything created by God is composed of the matter and the form. In *De substantiis separatis* Aquinas was similarly considering whatever that can be adopted from Aristotle's opinions for explaining the separated substances, to which he added his interpretation of theory of participation, i.e., the key idea of the Platonic tradition. We may therefore state that the Scripture and Aquinas's interpretation of Aristotle complemented by references to Church Fathers, Neoplatonist Proclus and Dionysius the Areopagite² are the point of departure of Aquinas's critique of Avicbron. Although Aquinas does not conclude that Avicbron's doctrine departed from the Scripture for being a Muslim, he nonetheless claims that Avicbron departed from Plato and Aristotle. Hence, in this study, I will compare Aquinas's and Avicbron's arguments to give an answer to a question whether Aquinas was right when he claimed that Avicbron departed from Aristotle's doctrine by his Universal Hylomorphism.

Aquinas's work thematically belongs to the scope of those Christian thinkers who made effort to protect an absolute simplicity of God in theological discussions by ascribing some kind of composition to the things He created. Since 80's of 13th century, philosophers and theologians made this in various ways. There are various solutions of this relation which can be discerned. Some representatives claimed that substance of all corporeal things is composed of corporeal matter and corporeal form. Other claimed that purely spiritual being such as angels or human souls are composed of the spiritual matter and the spiritual form "according to some, or of one and the same kind of matter in both corporeal entities and in spirits according to others". Another group of representatives based their solution on that already proposed by Boethius who discerned "between *quod est* and *esse*

² The name is in the form which was being used by Aquinas as well. "Pseudo" was added to name Dionysius the Areopagite only in 19th century after recognizing that he was not the one he was supposed to be.

in all beings with the exception of God, even though this distinction and composition was interpreted in widely divergent ways by different thinkers”³. Besides abovementioned solutions, some thinkers insisted that “one could adequately defend the non-simple character of substances other than God without appealing to any real distinction and composition either of matter and form or of essence and existence (*esse*) within them”⁴.

In *De substantiis separatis* Aquinas proceeded in his critique of Avicembron first by brief summarizing his doctrine in the fifth chapter named *The opinion of Avicembron and his arguments for it*, then he stated his reasons for *Refutation of Avicembron’s position* in sixth chapter when he identified Avicembron’s arguments as improbable. In seventh chapter titled *That of spiritual and corporeal substances there cannot be one matter*, Aquinas refused Avicembron’s opinion and finally formulated *On the refutation of Avicembron’s arguments* in eighth chapter. It should be noted that these chapters contain Aquinas’s summaries of Avicembron’s opinion. They resemble summaries *Epitome campililiensis* (Incipit Avicembron, qui alio nomina dicitur auctor Fontis vitae) which published C. Baeumker in Appendix to his publication of *Fons vitae* in 1885⁵. The goal of *Epitome* was not to refute but summarize Avicembron’s opinions. This comparison comes from the fact that Aquinas does not cite Avicembron’s opinion, only paraphrases them. I cannot claim with certainty that Aquinas read *Epitome* and it is not my aim to confirm or refute it in this study⁶. Aquinas’s summaries contain what he considered relevant from the perspective of catholic doctrine of angels. He did not take into account distinct goal of Avicembron’s work which was important for understanding the context of his Universal Hylomorphism. Aquinas wanted

³ J. F. Wippel, *Metaphysical Composition of Angels in Bonaventure, Aquinas, and Godfrey of Fontaines*, [in:] *A Companion to Angels in Medieval Philosophy*. ed. T. Hoffmann, Leiden–Boston 2012, p. 45.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ Avicembronis (Ibn Gebirol), *Fons vitae*, ex arabico in latinum translatus ab Iohanne Hispano et Dominico Gundissalino; ex codicibus Parisinis, Amploniano, Columbino primum edidit Clemens Baeumker, Munster i. W.: Aschendorff 1892–1895. Reedition 1995, pp. 341–387.

⁶ C. Baeumker supposed that *Epitome* is a Latin translation of the Hebrew excerption made according to the Arabic original of *Liber fontis vitae* by Shem Tov Ibn Falaquera in the 13th century. Baeumker thought that the unknown author of the Hebrew excerption into the Latin – maybe also made in the 13th century – must have been a scholar, or at least somebody well-read in Latin. *Epitome* is to be found in manuscript of codex No 144 of monastic library of Cistercians in Lilienfeld in Lower Austria. C. Baeumker considered proven that the copyist of *Epitome* could not be any professional because of a number of clerical errors and lacunas which was much greater as it could be possible to assign to the author of the Latin *Epitome*, who, according to Clemens Baeumker, was “endowed with esprit and knowledge”. C. Baeumker, *Prolegomena*, [in:] Avicembronis, *Fons vitae*, *op. cit.*, p. xv.

to provide an overview of various opinions on origin and properties of separated substances, i.e. angels, to suit the demand of his secretary Raynald/Reginald of Piperno whom he dedicated his work to.

The context of Aquinas' critique⁷ implies that term *separated substance* has the same meaning as Avicbron's term *spiritual substance*. In *Fons vitae* Avicbron did not use the term *angel* nor *separated substance*⁸ at all which mirrors the subtle differences between philosophy in Islamic and Christian world. He did not use any reference to Scripture in entire work either, which made it difficult to identify the authorship of this work until the first half of 19th century when it was accomplished by Solomon Munk⁹. It seems that author's opinion, not whether author of *Fons vitae* was a Muslim or not, was important to Aquinas. Neither it is clear which Latin manuscript of *Fons vitae* Aquinas dealt with, since he made no reference to any. We can just assume that it was perhaps the manuscript N = ms lat. N^o. 14 700, written on the parchment at the end of 13th century which is located in Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris (previously Book Fund Saint-Victor, N^o. 32, fol. 161v–228v). It is a manuscript which S. Munk identified as one of Ibn Gabirol's works. He also published *Extraits hébraïques*¹⁰, a French translation of summary from *Fons vitae* written in Hebrew by Ibn Falaquera.

Since Aquinas first summarized Avicbron's doctrine into five arguments and then analyzed it, I will proceed similarly, i.e., I will first summarize Aquinas' interpretation of Avicbron and subsequently compare it with Avicbron's opinions from *Fons vitae*. This will represent the point of departure for my answer to the question whether Aquinas's claim that

⁷ Paweł Milcarek wrote on the polemic between Aquinas and Avicbron following: "Podobnie jak w przypadku stosunku św. Tomasza do Awerroesa, także w jego odniesieniu do Awicbrona da się odczuć coś więcej niż dyskusję z jakimś martwym stanowiskiem sprzed dwustu lat. Chodzi raczej o dyskusję z poglądem mającym aktualnie swoich zwolenników w środowiskach intelektualnych znanych autorowi" (P. Milcarek, *Miejsce Awicbrona w tworzeniu się metafizyki egzystencjalnej*, [in:] „Przegląd Filozoficzny – Nowa Seria” 2007, R. 16, nr 1 (61), s. 126.

⁸ Depending on the context, Avicbron uses in *Fons vitae* terms simple, spiritual or intelligible substance. I do think this is a coincidence. Avicbron defines matter as a ground bearing the form and therefore form is that which is being borne. If everything created is composed of the matter and the form, then even simple substances have a ground which bears their form (essence).

⁹ *Mélanges de philosophie juive et arabe*. Renfermant des extraits méthodiques de la *Source de vie* de Salomon ibn-Gabirol (dit Avicbron), traduit en français sur la version hébraïque de Schem-Tob Ibn-Falaquera, et accompagnés de notes critiques et explicatives; – un Mémoire sur la vie, les écrits et la philosophie d'Ibn-Gebirol, – des Notices sur les principaux philosophes arabes et leurs doctrines, – et une Esquisse historique de la philosophie chez les Juifs. Par S. Munk. Paris, A. Franck 1859, pp. 3–149.

¹⁰ C. Baumker, *Prolegomena*, *op. cit.*, p. viii.

Avicbron departed from Aristotle was true or false. It will be closely connected with Aquinas's conviction that should anything founded in the treaties of the philosophers be incompatible with the faith, it is a fault of reason, not of philosophy. His subtle treating with philosophical reasoning did not lead him to reducing philosophy to theology. He respected their distinct foundations. Philosophy, according to him, is searching for reasons of that we see and is critically discussing results of the previous thinkers. Based on articles of faith, theology, unlike philosophy, is operating with human reason and authority of philosophers¹¹. He therefore started his work with criticism of the opinions of the Presocratics and Plato, comparison of Plato's and Aristotle's¹² opinions, though it is evident that they were never interested in the problem of the nature of angels. In the context of Aquinas's critique of Avicbron's teaching of simple substances composed of the matter and the form, it means that he could consider this teaching to be a result of Avicbron's fault in reasoning and a fault in understating Aristotle, respectively.

Aquinas's arguments against Avicbron's arguments

Aquinas included general characteristics of Avicbron's opinion, mostly drawn from the first tractate of *Fons vitae*¹³ in *first Avicbron's argument*. He claimed that the separated substances according to Avicbron have distinct

¹¹ In *Summa Theologica* Aquinas reflected on the theology and philosophy as follows: "I q. 1 a. 1 arg. 2. Further, knowledge can be concerned only with being, for nothing can be known, save what is true; and all that is, is true. But everything that is, is treated of in philosophical science, even God himself; so that there is a part of philosophy called theology, or the divine science, as Philosopher has proven in Book 6 of *Metaphysics*. 1. Therefore, besides philosophical science, there is no need of any further knowledge. I q. 1 a. 1 s. c. On the contrary, it is written in Second Epistle to Timothy 3, 16: "All Scripture, inspired by God is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice. Now Scripture, inspired of God, is no part of philosophical science, which has been built up by human reason. Therefore it tis useful that besides philosophical science, there should be other knowledge, i. e. inspired of God." T. Akvinský, *Suma teologická*. 1. část, 1. otázka, 1. – 10. článok. Prel. Michal Chabada [in:] "Filozofia", R. 66 (2011), Nr. 1, p. 85.

¹² Aquinas did not interpret Aristotle as a historical author, nor did he strive for historically accurate explanation of Aristotle's teaching. Aquinas was entirely dependent on average translations, he could not speak Greek and he had no idea that *Metaphysics* was not coherent, uniformly designed work but variegated conglomerate. Nonetheless, "his commentaries belongs to few, indeed, congenial commentaries uncovering Aristotle's doctrine." J. Pipper, *Tomáš Akvinský*. Praha: Vyšehrad 1997, p. 53. It is also well known that "Aquinas's philosophy is fundamentally an extrapolation of Aristotle's, adjusted here and there to suit Christian doctrine." *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*. N. Kretzman, E. Stump (eds.), Cambridge 1999, p. 11.

¹³ The title of the first tractate is *De his quae debent praeponi ad assignationem materiae et formae universalis et ad assignationem materiae et formae in substantiis compositis*.

nature, by which he meant their composition of the matter and the form, and he marks this as a departure from Plato's as well as Aristotle's opinion¹⁴. Aquinas described Avicbron's method as a procedure based on rationally knowable composition in various categories of things, "because he thought that according to the intelligible composition found in the genera of things, inasmuch, namely, as a species is composed of genus and difference, there would likewise be understood such a composition in things themselves, so that in the case of each and every thing existing in a genus, the genus is matter and the difference is form"¹⁵. Therefore according to Avicbron "to be' in potency, 'to be' a subject, and 'to be' a recipient would in all cases be said according to one notion"¹⁶.

Within this argument, Aquinas mentioned Avicbron's method of analysis (*resolutio*) reaching eventually intellectual substances. This procedure led Avicbron to state that the matter and the form are two roots of each created thing, which for Aquinas opposes Plato's procedure of reducing

¹⁴ Aquinas founded consolidation between opinions of Plato, whom he sometimes mistook for Plotinus in *De substantiis separatis*, and Aristotle's opinions which he integrated into formation of his metaphysics. Based on this fact, we may assign Aquinas to Medieval thinkers who accepted first original Aristotle's and later Peripatetic metaphysics united with Plotinus's ideas, including the emanation which is not at first sight compatible with theological conception *creatio ex nihilo*. From this perspective, Aquinas's metaphysics is Neoplatonist Aristotelianism which had been common among philosophers of Islamic world since al-Kindi. It is generally accepted that this kind of metaphysics reached its peak in Avicenna's philosophy. "Scholastics became acquainted with Peripatetic legacy in many forms and Ibn Sina has leading position. The influential stream of Latin Avicennism which cannot be accepted as solely Peripatetic legacy was developing based on the reception of his work." M. Otisk, *Metafyzika jako věda. Ibn Síná a Ibn Rušd ve scholastické diskusi. Avicenna: Kniha o první filosofii I, 1–2. Averroes: Epitomé k Aristotelově Metafyzice I. Text a poznámky k překladu: Marek Otisk. Překlad: Richard Psik. Praha 2006, p. 17–18. On influence of Arabian philosophy upon transforming metaphysics into ontology, see study of Aleksander Lisowski in which he writes: "To prawda, że to właśnie wielcy filozofowie arabscy Al-Farabí i Awicenna odkryli w strukturze bytu istnienie, jednakże to właśnie Tomasz dokonał "kopernikańskiego przewrotu" w metafizyce realistycznej, dostrzegając fakt absolutnej dominacji aktu istnienia w strukturze każdego bytu." ("Przegląd Filozoficzny – Nowa Seria", 2007, R. 16, Nr 1 (61), p. 158). John F. Wippel wrote on the reaction to influx of translations of Arabic works into Latin and their influence following: "Upon being faced so speedily with so much literature of non-Christian origins, Latin thinkers and Churchmen had to react quickly, and to try to determine how believing Christians should respond. Needless to say, their reactions varied considerably." J. F. Wippel, *Thomas Aquinas and the Condemnation of 1277*, [in:] "The Modern Schoolman", LXXII, January/ March 1995, p. 233.*

¹⁵ *De substantiis separatis. Treatise on seaparate substances by Thomas Aquinas*, [online] [2017-06-11]. Available on: <http://www.dhspriority.org/thomas/SubstSepar.htm>.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 223.

everything to formal principles. Examining the properties of the matter and the form brought Avicbron to conclusion that there are species of the matter and the form. There is artificial individual matter, natural individual matter, natural universal matter permitting begetting and supernal matter. All four are supplemented by their form dwelling inside each one which sustains itself. These matters exist in the hierarchical order. Though being diverse, all four species of the matter and the form share the terms *m a t t e r* and *f o r m*. In sensible things nothing else exists besides these. These four elements, despite their diversity, are united by the fact that they are flesh. Likewise, their forms are united by the fact that they are the form of the flesh. Thus, the forms are one in species, namely sensible form, and many in individual things, namely, in each of them. Therefore, there is only universal matter in sensible forms, i.e. flesh and universal form, that is everything which is being sustained in flesh¹⁷.

Identification of the matter with being in potency and the form with being in act is the point of departure of Aquinas's critique of this Avicbron's argument. So Aquinas relies on Aristotle's interpretation of change/motion originating in the moment of transition from potentiality to actuality. Hence, he claims that potentiality is an essence of the matter which belongs to the category of substance, for this category as well as others is further divided through potency and act. It implies that "nothing prevents certain substances which are only potential to be diverse according as they are ordered to diverse genera of acts; in which sense the matter of the heavenly bodies is distinguished from the matter of the elements"¹⁸.

Aquinas discerns between perfect and incomplete act, i.e. perfect and imperfect form. According to him, the matter of supernal bodies is in potency to perfect act, i.e. form which accomplishes entire potentiality of the matter, so there remains no potency for other forms. While matter of elements is in the potency to incomplete form which cannot determine the entire potency of the matter, "but above these matters, there is spiritual matter, that is a spiritual substance, which receives a form according to its totality while the lower matter receives their form in a particular way"¹⁹. In other words, the diversity of substances depends on the forms which are joined in their matter. Hence, the difference between substances is not determined by the matter.

¹⁷ *The Font of Life, (Fons vitae)* by Solomon Ibn Gabirol (Avicbron), translated from the Latin with an Introduction by J. A. Laumakis, Milwaukee (Wisconsin): Marquette University Press 2014, I 17, p. 74-75.

¹⁸ *De substantiis separatis. Treatise on seaparate substances by Thomas Aquinas*, [online] [2017-07-12] available on: <http://www.dhspriority.org/thomas/SubstSepar.htm#5>.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

The matter of supernal bodies differs from elemental matter by relating to various genera of forms/acts. In other words, Aquinas is considering the hierarchy of forms too and their ontological value, which, unlike Aristotle, he regards as archetypes of all things existing in the mind of God. It may be claimed that he brought a tad little bit of Platonism in Aristotle's doctrine of the matter and the form.

Avicbron would accept in his reply that "to be in potency" is to thinking the matter without the form, secondly, that "to be a subject" is to consider something a ground, whereas thirdly, "to be a recipient" means that something is the ground receiving a form, because Avicbron's entire analysis of Being in *Fons vitae* is resolving (*resolutio*) everything within thinking which led to establishing the matter and the form as two metaphysical principles of all created being and defining their properties²⁰. We can agree with Aquinas that Avicbron's conception furthermore assumes that we should be able to understand even the real composition of the very things through rationally knowable composition. Since Avicbron had always the real composition of thing on his mind which knowing is reached by rational knowledge, he accented that it is not possible to think of the matter without its relation to the form. Hence, accordance between thinking of things and their being belongs to the point of departure of epistemological aspect of Avicbron's Universal Hylomorphism. It is well known that it was Aquinas who, inspired by Aristotle, characterized specific cognitive activity of our reason as *adaequatio rei et intellectus*. Knowledge of things implies that the analysis of their metaphysical principles is based on formal features – in other words, on the formed matter, not solely matter, and it is also in accordance with Aristotle.

In the context of the discussing the being of things, particularly the matter, Avicbron applies Aristotle's term privation. The discussion implied that though the matter is called deprived, it must not be said that it has within itself a being, which it has only when it is joined to the form, just because it has being in potency. We cannot claim that the matter is absolutely deprived, because "it has being in itself in potency, namely, that being that it had in the knowledge of the eternal, exalted, and great one, not composed with

²⁰ According to Avicbron, the universal matter is "to be subsisting through itself so that reasoning does not proceed to infinity, if matter did not exist in itself. It has one essence for the reason that we sought only one matter of all things. It sustains diversity, because diversity comes only from forms, and forms do not exist through themselves. It gives its own essence and name to all things because, since it sustains all things, it is necessary that it exists in all things, and since it exists in all things, it is necessary that it gives its own essence and name to all things." *The Font of Life (Fons vitae)*, I 10, p. 69.

form”²¹. Avicbron employed analogy for better understanding this: being of matter in God’s wisdom is the same as being of concept in my soul “because, although it is in privation with respect to you, it still must not for this reason be in privation with respect to me”. And he continues, “that matter has being in potency, that is, that it was the power for sustaining form”²². Therefore, Avicbron would refuse Aquinas’s claim that substances being in potency vary with regard to various genera of acts, because it opposes his points of departures. One of these points is that the matter has being only if we assign spiritual form to it. “In itself, however, it does not have the being that it has when form is joined to it, and this is being in act. Otherwise, when we say it has being, it has being only in potency”²³.

According to Avicbron, if we wish to understand the relation between the matter and the form, we have to know the effects of substances which came into existence by their unification. This is true also in case of spiritual substances which correspond in the spiritual matter but differ in the form, because their effects are different, “and it is not possible that the matters of these substances are diverse, because they are all simple and spiritual. And diversity comes only from form, and simple matter does not have form in itself”²⁴. So if Avicbron claims that diversity of spiritual substances comes from the forms, what is Aquinas actually criticizing?

On the other hand, when Aquinas says that above individual matters, there is a spiritual matter, that is a spiritual substance which receives a form according to its totality while the lower matters receive their form in a particular way, it seems like he is getting closer to Avicbron who in this way reached the conclusion that there must be one universal matter which gives other matters its name. It differs from the rest of matters by its properties, i.e. existent in and of itself, being of single essence, sustaining diversity and giving to everything its essence and name. These properties can be found “by intellectual resolution, that is, by abstracting each form of what exists from another and, in this way, proceeding from the manifest to the hidden, until you come to the form after which there is not another form. This is the form that precedes all the forms of what sustains it”²⁵. We thereby come to Avicbron’s Neoplatonic hierarchy of the matters and the forms, in which the universal form, being on its top and dwelling in the essence of God’s will, sustains every form in itself. Aquinas would locate its dwelling

²¹ *The Font of Life*, V 10, p. 225.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ *Ibidem*, I 13, p. 71.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, IV 1, p. 188.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, I 11, p. 70.

place in God. Within his hierarchy of the matters and the forms, Avicbron recognizes intellect, soul and nature as simple (spiritual) substances; supernal bodies and an earthly world as composite substances of lower world. Four already mentioned species of matter match with four species of form. We will get acquainted with them during the observation of the universal form's properties which are: persisting in the other, perfecting essence of that in which it is and giving it being. Should we find these properties in forms which exist, according to Avicbron, we have already found universal form²⁶.

Another important aspect of Avicbron's interpretation of relation between the matter and the form is that there is no matter without form since the very moment of creation. The creation is formed matter.²⁷ If applied to angels, according to Avicbron it must be true – and it is also implied by Scripture in Aquinas's opinion – that angels exist merely as formed spiritual matter since the very moment they have been created. Aquinas would strongly disagree and that is why he rigorously examined Avicbron's reasoning. Avicbron emphasized the necessity of united existence of both matter and form by describing their relation through the term unity²⁸ and explains that it “exists only due to the essence of matter, since unity is the form of the essence of matter, and matter is the matter of the essence of unity”²⁹. And he adds: “However, you ought to know that, because unity is the form of the intelligence, that is the reason for affirming the union of all forms in it, and consequently, it apprehends all things, because everything is united in its form, which is the universal unity that gathers every unity. And since every form is one and its essence is a unity that gathers every one, it is consequently established that all forms have being in the form of the intelligence”³⁰.

Although Aquinas does not deny in *De substantiis separatis* that angels, i.e., separated substances, were created, he regards them at the same time as diverse perfect forms, because he claims that spiritual substances are diverse if they are related to various genera of acts. It means that even his interpretation of creation differs from that of Avicbron. Although Avicbron admitted that, being in mind and as a principle of created being, the matter without the form is a being in potency (in God's wisdom) and that form is real existing being (in God's will), he did not, however, admit that the matter and the form could exist separately after creation not even

²⁶ *Ibidem*, I 17, pp. 74–75.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, V 30, pp. 245–246.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, IV 11, pp. 202–203.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, IV 11, p. 202.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, IV 12, p. 204.

for a second. For him, it was impossible! To be is to be formed matter!³¹ It is true also for spiritual substances. However, according to Aquinas, angels, separated substances, are pure forms without the matter. Avicbron would therefore ask Aquinas: What sustains these pure forms? Aquinas searched and found an interesting answer which fit into the context of philosophical research in 13th century³².

Influenced by Dionysius the Areopagite, Aquinas claimed in the first place that the spiritual substances “owe to the divine being that they are, and to the divine life that they are living and so forth”³³. Aquinas again cited Dionysius in this context when he strived to explain that “the eternal beings cannot be thought to be absolutely coeternal with God, Who is before eternity”³⁴. He honestly admitted that in Scripture, there is “no explicit mention of the production of spiritual substances – lest an occasion of idolatry be given to an unlettered people”³⁵. And eventually he claimed that “reason itself makes clear, for it was not fitting that the more perfect should be created later”³⁶. Thus he joined Sacred Doctors who taught regarding spiritual substances “that the angels are incorporeal and immaterial”³⁷. But

³¹ In the last chapter of the fourth tractate we can, however, come across a following assertion: “This is the will, which drew form out of potency to act, although every form exists in the will in act with respect to what acts and it is said to exist in potency only with respect to what is made. When you consider the power of the will and what forms it has in its essence, you will see that what universal matter acquired from it, namely, all the forms sustained in it, although they are luminous, many, and great, is in comparison with what the will has in itself of this just like what the air acquired from the light of the sun” (*The Font of Life*, IV 20, p. 213).

³² “Spiritual matter was very useful for thirteenth-century angelology because Christian writers saw no other solution to the key issues regarding the distinction of spiritual substances between themselves and drawing clear borderline between the God and creation. Due to Aristotle’s metaphysics in which act could be understood only as the form and potency could be assigned only to mater, the only composition of potency and act could be the composition of form and matter. Therefore, the only way to claim potentiality of spiritual substances was to ascribe to them some kind of matter. Potency of angels was indispensable to explain their plurality and distinguish them from the simple being of God. That is why Avicbron’s conclusions seemed unavoidable to many Medieval scholars, and Aquinas’ solution was perceived as revolutionary and even unorthodox”, [in:] Tomasz Stępień, *Aquinas against spiritual matter*, “Epekeina”, vol. 6, Nr 2 (2015), p. 12.

³³ *De substantiis separatis. Treatise on separate substances*. [online] [2017-07-12] available on: <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/SubstSepar.htm#5>. So here we come across two roots of creation also in Aquinas’s thought: our Being comes from God and life/soul comes from Life/Soul.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

it would not be a sufficient answer yet. On another place in *De substantiis separatis* Aquinas writes “that the more imperfect is in potency in relation to the more perfect and so on upward to the first Form, which is act only, namely, God; so that, in this way, lower spiritual substances can be called matter according as they are in potency and forms according as they are in act”³⁸. Aquinas finally admits that if there is any matter in the spiritual substances, it is not identical with the matter of corporeal things, “but much nobler and finer, since it receives form according to its totality”³⁹.

Avicbron would agree with assertion that lower spiritual substances can be called matter according as they are in potency and forms according as they are in act. Due to the fact that Avicbron lived approximately between 1021/22–1057 and Aquinas between 1224–1274, one possible conclusion is that it was Avicbron who inspired Aquinas’s solution for the problem of existence of spiritual substances as pure forms. Nonetheless, Aquinas’s and Avicbron’s point of departure are slightly different. Aquinas never admitted the existence of spiritual or universal matter.

In *second Avicbron’s argument*, Aquinas focused on Avicbron’s discerning between term “spirituality” and “corporeity”. In Aquinas’s view, Avicbron claims that term “spirituality” is not contained in term “corporeity”, because corporeal and spiritual substances have something by which they differ from each other, and something in common, i.e., that they are substances. “Hence, just as in the case of corporeal substance, substance is as matter upholding corporeity, so in the case of spiritual substance, substance is as matter upholding spirituality. And according as matter participates more or less in the form of spirituality, spiritual substances are accordingly higher or lower, just as the finer the air is, the more it participates in clarity”⁴⁰. Through this paraphrasing Avicbron’s opinion, Aquinas reached fourth tractate of *Fons vitae* with the title *Inquiry into knowledge of matter and form in simple substances*.

Aquinas considers this opinion which comes from the nature of forms to be false. For him it is evident that if things, composed of the matter and the form, differ in forms, then they are different forms themselves. If Avicbron claimed that forms of various things differ just in matter, then it is necessary

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ *Ibidem*. On the question – why is something called composite and some simple? – Avicbron would answer: “For something composite is simple in relation to what is lower than it, and something simple is composite in relation to what is higher than it.” (*The Font of Life*, IV 4, p. 192).

⁴⁰ *De substantiis separatis. Treatise on separate substances*. [online] [2017–07–14] available on: <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/SubstSepar.htm>.

to prefer one form to another within the matter, just like we understand that surface precedes colour in bodies. Hence, there is a configuration of perfection and imperfection in forms, since form closer to matter is less perfect and it is as if in potency with regard to other incoming form. Though being just forms, nothing thereby restrain us to recognize a multiplicity in spiritual substances, since one form is more perfect than the other; less perfect form is thus in potency with regard to more perfect one, and so on to the first form which is merely in act, and that is God. Therefore, we may say that lower spiritual substances are *m a t t e r s* according as they are in potency and *f o r m s* according as they are in act⁴¹.

Avicbron would accept that the spiritual substances are forms of different perfection whose matter is other, lower spiritual substance understood as *m a t t e r*. It is so, for it was his own idea. However, he never claimed that one single kind of matter may contain various forms at different times. That would be the same as if Aquinas said that the single lower spiritual substance may be sometime the matter for less perfection or more perfection in another time. If individual forms participate in the meaning of spirituality by the fact that they all are forms, it is necessary for that which they participated in to be the universal form, which is according to Avicbron located in God's will. This conclusion is probably not so different from Aquinas's opinion, because the common base for both is Platonism.

Concerning the relation of the term spirituality to the term corporeity and to make the term spirituality, as a form being sustained by other form which describes it, Avicbron uses this relation in expounding the composition of spiritual substance. He claims that the definition of spiritual substance is a term, it is therefore composed of *definiendum* (matter) and *definiens* (form) determining it. Thus, we can distinguish matter from the form in defining the spiritual substance. In other words, that which shows up as *definiendum* and *definiens* while defining the term "spirituality", are different from that which shows up in the case of the term "corporeity". Distinguishing between the term "spiritual substance" in intelligence and soul, and distinguishing between both intelligence and soul in flesh, and their separation from each other, are the sign of distinguishing between the matter and the form. "Moreover, the fact that one of the spiritual substances is more simple and more perfect than another is a sign that, above the spirituality that follows after body, there is another spirituality that is more perfect than it"⁴². Aquinas would not agree.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² *The Font of Life*, IV 2, p. 189.

The last sentence is the best example of difference between Avicbron's and Aquinas's understanding of the matter. In this case, matter is rather material for Aquinas, whereas Avicbron passes in his reflections on spiritual substances (intellect⁴³, soul, nature) into intelligible sphere which differs in its properties from that perceptible by senses. In this sphere, species may be the form and genus may be the matter. To define also means that defined species is assigned to genus, which would determine the principle for this definition. This is impossible in case of the universal matter and the universal form, because there is no more universal matter or more universal form above them. Avicbron claims that if they cannot be defined, we cannot describe their properties⁴⁴.

Faithful to his conviction that spiritual substance needs necessarily no matter to exist, Aquinas opposed that it is similarly false to consider perfection and imperfection as forms added to subject, i.e. accidents. "For there is a certain perfection which a thing has according to its species and substance, which is not compared to that thing as an accident to a subject or a form to matter, but designates the proper species itself of the thing"⁴⁵. And he continues that "for everything that is related to another as potency to act is naturally subject to it, and in this way, likewise, a spiritual substance,

⁴³ Intellect is for Avicbron the first thing created. It partly suggests that, in writing *Fons vitae*, Avicbron could be inspired by Aristotle's theology. This possibility results from following: "The first of created things is the first intellect, which is united with the word of the Creator, (may He be exalted), which is the first *substantum* of the first form, the genus of genera which comprises all substance, and which possesses pure brilliance and unmixed light. Then follows the second intellect, which is like the species of the first, because out of it was composed its substratum and its form, which is united to the essence of that in which it is" (S. Pessin, *Ibn Gabirol's Theology of Desire. Matter and Method in Jewish Medieval Neoplatonism*. Cambridge 2013, p. 177).

⁴⁴ Through its properties, the universal matter is described as follows: it is a substance existing in itself, a sustainer of diversity, being one in number; it is a substance capable of receiving any form. The universal form is described like this: it is a substance establishing the essence of all forms, a perfect wisdom, the purest light. *The Font of Life*, V 22. Light and dark are the central motives of all Platonic tradition. Dionysius the Areopagite, who significantly influenced Aquinas's metaphysics, deals with the light in many works. "The author of *The Divine Names* speaks of light in a metaphysical sense, referring its properties to the manner in which knowledge is transmitted (emanation, radiation, illumination, lifegiving, permeation), and thus moves on to use the term 'light' in order to render the actualizing powers being the manifestation of Divine Authority called Good, which he calls 'supra-substantial light' in what the transcendent One allows divine intellects, i. e. in the highest knowledge of itself available to creatures." S. Blandzi, *The Goodness of Light and the Light of Good. Symbolism of Light in Ancient Gnostology and in Eastern Christianity*, "Archiwum Historii Filozofii i Myśli Społecznej". Vol. 55/2010, p. 634 (pp. 51–64.)

⁴⁵ *De substantiis separatis. Treatise on separate substances*. [online] [2017-07-17] available on: <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/SubstSepar.htm>.

although it does not have matter as a part of itself, nevertheless, insofar as it is in some respect in potency, can be subject to intelligible forms⁴⁶.

In Aquinas's view, Avicbron returned to opinions of ancient natural philosophers who taught that all things are one being and that only the matter is a substance of all things, and differs from them only by assumption that this substance is the universal matter. It comes from the fact that genus is a matter of things which have this genus in common and species differences are forms by which species differ from each other. The common matter of all substances is a substance itself. If the substance, pertaining to all things, is relating to species differences – “spiritual” and “corporeal” – as the matter and their subject, then it implies that these two designations come to substance as its accidental properties. This opinion opposes, according to Aquinas, the correct understanding of primal matter, because if being in potency belongs to the nature of the matter, then the primal matter must be contained completely in the potency. Hence, the primal matter does not pertain to any existing thing or any part of the whole. Aquinas was convinced that “if it is of the nature of matter that it be in potency, then prime matter must be completely in potency. As a consequence, it is not predicated of any actually existing thing, just as a part is not predicated of the whole. This position likewise destroys the principles of logic by doing away with the true nature of genus, species, and substantial difference, inasmuch as it reduces them all to the mode of accidental predication⁴⁷.”

Another Avicbron's mistake, according to Aquinas, is that he adds perfection and imperfection as forms of subject, i.e., makes them accidents which need subject. The perfection of thing for Aquinas is provided by the species of substance of thing and it is not related to the thing as accident to the subject or the form to the matter. Perfection of a thing itself designates a species of thing. Secondly, Avicbron is mistaken because to be a subject does not belong merely to the matter which is part of the substance, but to any potency in general. To be a subject is inherent to each thing which relates to other as potency to act. Based on this, Aquinas could reach an original conclusion that, in this way, spiritual substance may be a subject of intelligible forms according as it is being in potency of some kind, although without matter as a part of it.

Avicbron would answer that if something is in complete potency, i.e. completely separated from the matter, then it can exist only in God and, in case of matter, only in God's wisdom as it was mentioned before.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁷ *Ibidem.*

I have already stated which properties Avicbron assigned to the universal matter and the universal form. That is also an answer to Aquinas's critique. Avicbron regarded form as a matter if it was sustaining other form. Aquinas would agree, because he used this in his reasoning why the angels are spiritual substances. Therefore, this Aquinas's objection cannot be accepted.

Third Avicbron's argument contains Aquinas's conclusion that common being is located in the spiritual substances as higher substances and corporeal substances as lower substances. Hence, that which belongs to being in corporeal substances, belongs also to being of spiritual substances. There are three orders in the corporeal substances: hard body, i.e. elemental body; subtle body, i.e. heavenly body; and a matter and form of body. Thus, there is a lower spiritual substance in spiritual substance, i.e., that which is related to the body and higher spiritual substance which is not related to body, and finally the matter and the form which spiritual substance consist of. Here, Aquinas ignored Neoplatonic rules by which Avicbron explains relations between higher and lower substances: lower is flown out of higher; properties of lower mirror those of higher; higher gives to lower its name and definition, determination respectively; forms being sustained in composite substances are flown out of simple substances; evident is a form of latent.

According to Aquinas, not even third Avicbron's argument is correct. Since, in Aquinas view, we cannot definitely speak of all things as of beings, it is not necessary for each thing which we speak of as existent to have the same way of being. Some things participate in being more perfectly, other things less perfectly: „For accidents are called beings, not because they have 'to be' in themselves but because their 'to be' lies in the fact that they are in a substance. Again, there is not the same mode of 'to be' in all substances. For those substances which share in 'to be' most perfectly, do not have in themselves something which is a being only in potency. That is why they are called immaterial substances”⁴⁸.

Avicbron would answer that substance and (complete) accident are opposites and because of their diversity in essence it is therefore not possible to share the same genus. He would agree with Aquinas that accidents, unlike substances, do not exist in themselves, as he claimed in twenty third chapter of the fifth tractate in his *The Font of Life*. We may find more of Avicbron's analysis of relations between substance and accidents, if we notice Avicbron's explanation of relations of substance which sustains nine categories. For

⁴⁸ *De substantiis separatis. Treatise on separate substances.* [online] [2017-07-17] available on: <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/SubstSepar.htm>.

example, in expounding the properties of quality and quantity Avicbron is reflecting subsequently:

(24) Quantity and quality are two forms. But every form comes to be from a form. Therefore, quantity and quality do not come to be from the substance that sustains them. Likewise, quantity and quality come to be from a form. And apart from composite substance and simple substance, form is nothing. Quantity and quality, therefore, come to be only from a simple substance. (25) Quantity is a multitude, and a multitude is composed of ones. Therefore, quantity is composed of ones. Composite ones, however, come from a simple one. Therefore, quantity is composed from the one of a simple substance. The one in a simple substance is a simple accident, and a composite accident is composed from a simple accident. Therefore, a composite accident is composed from the one of a simple accident. Therefore, a composite accident is composed from the one of a simple substance. Likewise, quantity is composed of ones. And composite ones are a composite accident. Therefore, quantity is a composite accident. To this conclusion, I will add this proposition: A composite accident is composed from the one of a simple substance. Quantity is, therefore, composed from the one of a simple substance⁴⁹.

It implies that accidents, according to Avicbron, do not come from substance which sustains them but from the simple substance. Concerning the quantity, it is the form composed of individual parts. Simple part is a simple accident (form). Composite accident is composed of the simple parts of simple substances. Simple accidents are properties of higher substances, composite accidents are properties of lower substances. The notion of Avicbron's understanding of accidents in relation to substance which sustains them can be found in the second tractate of *The Font of Life* named *On the substance that sustains the Corporeity of the World*. There he writes:

I say that, after the soul was deprived of the knowledge of secondary accidents and secondary substances from the time it was bound to the body but afterwards regains it when it comes in contact with primary accidents and primary substances and meditates on them and understands them, it is evident that primary accidents and primary substances, that is, the world of nature, are set forth for it and the senses are adapted to it so that it may by them come in contact with primary substances and primary accidents, it may also apprehend by means of them secondary accidents and secondary substances. Because of this, a human being is such that, when he apprehends

⁴⁹ *The Font of Life*, III 19, p. 137.

knowledge of sensible things from the beginning of his birth in this world, his intelligence increases by means of it and goes forth from potency to act. For the forms of sensible things are stamped on his sense organs, they are similar to them. And the forms that are stamped on his sense organs are also stamped on the imagination in a more subtle and simple way than they were stamped on his sense organs, and they are similarly stamped on the essence of the soul in a more subtle and simple way than they were stamped on the imagination. Consequently, the relation of sensible forms to the soul is like the relation of a book to a reader, because when the sight senses a book's markings, the soul will recollect the meanings of those marking and its own certitude⁵⁰.

Avicbron like Aquinas thus integrated participation on being in his metaphysics as a way of interpreting the existence of beings. This interpretation can be found also in his explanation of relation between substances and forms in terms of "sustain" and "being sustained". There would be no being, if there was no primal universal matter in God's wisdom and primal universal form in God's will. In this sense, each created being participates in the matter and the form in God. This participation then repeats on every level of hierarchy of that which came into existence by joining four matters and their four corresponding forms. On question – why do even intelligible substances have matter and form? – Avicbron would answer like this: I proved that every created thing is composed of the matter and the form. Spiritual substances were created, therefore are composed of the matter and the form. Intelligible substances are spiritual substances, hence, they are composed of the matter and the form. All intelligible matters and forms coincide, i.e. participate in the meaning of the matter and the form. They became universal in similar way as it is in sensible substances, i.e., if individual matters participate in the meaning of matter by the fact that they are matters, so it is necessary for that which they participate to be a universal matter⁵¹. By referring to the participation, Avicbron similarly justified the relations between individual forms and universal form.

Despite the fact that Platonic doctrine of participation is inseparable part of his metaphysics, Aquinas refuses to integrate these rules in defining the set of categories linked with Aristotle's philosophy such as substance. When Aquinas speaks of spiritual substance, he always speaks of it as of separated, i.e., detached from the matter. He speaks also of ontological value of beings but he rejects Avicbron's consistent interpretation of creation

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, II 6, p. 83–84.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, IV 7, pp. 106–197.

consisting of two roots – the matter and the form – to which the creation can return. In Avicbron's view, the matter has a form because creation must be finite and it can be thus only through having a form. If everything could be traced to the single root, there would be no difference between this single root and single creator. And it would be also necessary that this root was merely a matter or merely a form. If it was merely a matter, it would not be possible for forms to come about through it; and if the forms were not coming about, they would not have being. For Avicbron, this is also necessary because, otherwise, it would be possible for reason to analyze the matters and forms *ad infinitum*.

Fourth Avicbron's argument includes his opinion that each created substance necessarily differs from its creator. Though creator is, however, pure one, therefore it is necessary that no created substance would be a pure one, but instead composed of two, one must be form and the other the matter, since nothing can come to existence without both of them.

This argument is not correct, according to Aquinas, either. It is not true that if spiritual substances do not have the matter, they do not differ from God, since "for if we take away the potentiality of matter, there remains in them a certain potentiality insofar as they are not 'to be' itself but they share in 'to be'. For there can be only one being which is 'to be' itself, just as some form, if it should be considered by itself, can be only one"⁵².

That which Aquinas calls certain potentiality, Avicbron relates with that which guarantees existence of creation. And that is the matter and the form as two roots of everything being created and both exist eternally in God. Therefore, only that which came into existence by uniting the matter with the form is a being in relation to creation. That part of Avicbron's reasoning in which he regards the matter as that which sustains, form as that which is being sustained, but also relating the matter with potentiality and form with actuality, is perhaps paradoxical to Aquinas. In Aquinas's view, the potentiality in separated substances is participation of separated substance in being which subsists in itself and is one. Subsisting form is not non-being but act by which form participates in the last act which is being (itself). Hence, potency in spiritual substance is to be understood as oriented on being, potency of the matter as oriented on both form and being. "If someone were to say that both potencies are matter, it is clear that he is using the word 'matter' equivocally"⁵³.

⁵² *De substantiis separatis. Treatise on separate substances.* [online] [2017-07-17] available on: <http://dhspriory.org/thomas/SubstSepar.htm#5>.

⁵³ *Ibidem.*

If Avicbron holds an opinion that existence of creation is upheld by participation, then it is participation in the form as well as in the matter, because everything which God created out of his wisdom and by his will is composite and founded in him. Only God's will is a pure form and only God's wisdom is a pure matter. Here a question rises – what, according to Aquinas, makes separated substances different to God? Obviously, God for Aquinas is perfectly simple and the same is claimed about the separated substances. Aquinas solves this problem by pointing out the difference between essence and existence. For him, each essence (in this case *quidity*) can be understood without understanding its being (*esse*). Essence of thing can be understood even without knowing whether it exists or not. Therefore, it is evident that *esse* (act of being) differs from essence (*quidity*) in such entities. Essence does not differ from existence only in God. Existence of separated substances is dependent on God.

Avicbron wrote *The Font of Life* as a means of achieving happiness through the cognition of the universal matter and the universal form. Man knows himself and, through it, he knows other which is outside him, “for his essence comprehends and penetrates all things, and all things are subject to his power. Along with this, he should also seek knowledge of the final cause on account of which he was made so that he may be eager for it to a great extent, because on account of this he will attain happiness”⁵⁴. However, Avicbron at the same time warned that “this is possible, namely, to know it but only from its Works, which are generated by it”⁵⁵. Intelligence can be known because it is similar to the soul and they touch each other. The first essence is not, however, similar to the intelligence, nor does it have some agreement with it, for it is not joined to any of the composite or simple things, and the relation of simple thing to it concerning the impossibility of knowing it is like the relation of a composite thing to a simple thing concerning the impossibility of knowing it⁵⁶.

In entire *Fons vitae*, Avicbron emphasizes knowing the essence of the universal matter and the universal form, because it makes a soul softer, clarifies our reason and thereby we penetrate the world of intelligence. It is not finite knowledge but a precursor to other knowledge, the knowledge of the world of divinity. Through it, we can save ourselves from death and cling to the origins of life⁵⁷. Our knowledge is knowledge of form, i.e., the essence of things which we may know only because it forms a matter. This

⁵⁴ *The Font of Life*, I 2, p. 62.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, I 4, p. 64.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, I 5, pp. 64–65.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, V 43, pp. 259–261.

is an Aristotelian trait in epistemological aspect of Avicbron's Hylomorphism.

Fifth Avicbron's argument. Each created spiritual substance is finite. A thing is finite only by its form because thing without form, by which it becomes one, is infinite. Each spiritual substance is thus composed of the matter and the form.

Aquinas's critique of fifth argument is based on that which was mentioned above. Spiritual substance participates in being in the way which is inherent to its essence. It is clear then that being is finite. Since form of spiritual substance is not received in matter, it is not restricted in the way in which forms existing in matters are. Unlike spiritual substances, material substances are, in Aquinas's view, limited and finite in two ways: by form and by being in which they participated in their own way and thus they exist as limited as if from above and below. "A spiritual substance, however, is finite from above, inasmuch as it receives 'to be' from the First Principle according to its proper mode; it is infinite from below, insofar as it is not received in a subject. But the First Principle, God, is infinite in every way"⁵⁸.

Based on his understanding the matter and the form, Avicbron would not agree with Aquinas that spiritual substance is the form which was not received in the matter. He would also claim that everything what is formed is limited. Otherwise, it could not be spiritual substance. Material substances are formed matter as well and therefore they are limited and restricted. Avicbron recommended that we should think of the matter as having two extremes, two limits: one ascending to the limit of creation, to beginning of the union of matter and form and the other descending to the brink of cessation. "Imagine that the part of it that is above the heaven has a spiritual form, and imagine that, the more this spiritual thing ascends, the more united and more simple it will be, until it reaches the beginning of creation. Similarly, imagine that the part of it that descends from the highest point of the heaven will have a corporeal form, and observe that, the lower it descends. The more corporeal it will be, until body reaches the end of stillness"⁵⁹.

Similarly, Avicbron wrote of limitedness and finiteness when he spoke on the possibility of knowledge of creation. Because "the farthest limit of sensible substance is shape and species, and the farthest limit of intelligible substance is difference and form"⁶⁰.

⁵⁸ *De substantiis separatis. Treatise on separate substances.* [online] [2017-09-18] available on: <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/SubstSepar.htm#5>.

⁵⁹ *The Font of Life*, V 29, p. 245.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*.

Conclusion

The goal of Aquinas's *De substantiis separatis* was to explain the nature of angels in accordance with Catholic doctrine and those Aristotle's opinions which supported it. Aquinas regards angels as created spiritual substances which are pure forms. It is consistent with Aristotle's opinion that some substances do not need to have any matter, whereas composite substance is made out of perceptible matter, but the form is made out of the matter of the form (Met. 1023b). In expounding spiritual substances, Aquinas claims that their potentiality is their participation in being which subsists in itself and that is one. This subsisting form is not non-being but act participating in the last act which is being itself. Therefore, potency of spiritual substance is to be understood as oriented on being, potency of the matter as oriented on both form and being. The form gives matter to the being. Thus, the matter cannot exist without the form but some forms can exist without the matter. The form is not dependent on the matter. If some forms can exist only in the matter, it is not caused by themselves but the fact that they are too distant from the first principle, that is pure act. Hence, even an essence of pure substance is not a pure act. When someone claims that both spiritual and composite substances are potencies, i.e., the matters, it seems that he is using the term matter ambiguously. That is the reason why Aquinas refused Avicbron's opinion that spiritual substances are composed of the matter and the form.

However, Avicbron claimed that spiritual substances are composed of the matter and the form because they are formed forms created by God's will. Lower and composite forms are in potency to the higher forms which are therefore simple. As potencies, they are matters of the higher substances which are in this sense forms. Simple and composite substances are united without loss of the form of either. And all things united in this way are for Avicbron compatible. What does he mean by it? He claims that "simple substance and composite substance fall under the same genus. There exists, consequently, a substance above them that is simpler than them and common to them"⁶¹.

In general, the matter is the potency and the form is an act, i.e., form gives matter its being. For this to be true, both the matter and the form must have existed in God. Consequently, according to Avicbron, absolute privation cannot be assigned to the matter or absolute actuality to the form. Both preexisted as potencies: matter in God's wisdom, form in God's will. Therefore, (universal) matter and (universal) form are called two metaphysical

⁶¹ *The Font of Life*, III 5, p. 115.

roots of all creation by Avicbron. He claims that their markings are present in everything created. Aquinas was very familiar with the text of *Fons vitae* and therefore I claim that the logic of his reasoning, by which he justified “composition“ of separated substances as forms from which one is matter and other is form, was taken from Avicbron. Today, it is considered to be Aquinas’s original contribution to Catholic doctrine of angels. Does it mean that both thinkers departed from Aristotle’s doctrine of substance?

It also corresponds with Avicbron’s integration of logical genus and logical species into his Universal Hylomorphism. In this way, he could explain a connection between the matter and the form within a hierarchy of universe. Naturally, Avicbron adopted defining the genus and species from Aristotle. It is well known that Aristotle uses term genus in two senses: biological and logical. In logical sense, genus was defined as the highest universal concept (Top. I 5, 102a31ff) which deals with many, conceptually not similar but essentially different, individuals, species. Aristotle considers the genus an essential designation which gives answer to a question what thing is. Hence, the genus appears to be an element of definition in which it is identified as a difference belonging to *definiendum* (Top. VI 11, 149a 16 and VI 1, 139a 29–31). Aristotle’s notion of genus as the matter of species (Met. V 24, 1023b 2), which he further developed in Met. VII, 12, is also well known. Not only subject and essence but also their unity are substances.

If we return again to Avicbron’s claim that matter and form must have already existed in God’s wisdom and will, then both can be interpreted as subject and essence from which intellect was created as first created unit or substance. In this sense, I agree with Aquinas that the matter does not speak of any actually existing thing, nor any part of the whole. However, it is the matter that exists in God’s wisdom. Avicbron thus in Aquinas’s view “destroys the principles of logic by doing away with the true nature of genus, species, and substantial difference, inasmuch as it reduces them all to the mode of accidental predication”⁶². Accidents are nine categories which speak of substance that sustains them. Substances differ in properties which are presented by these nine categories. Spiritual, intelligible substances have other properties than corporeal substances. Therefore, I cannot fully agree with Aquinas that Avicbron’s interpretation of genus and species does not correspond with Aristotle’s logic and, hence, nor with his opinion that Avicbron’s reasoning contained errors. On the contrary, I think that Avicbron proceeded according to Aristotle’s requirements for scientific

⁶² *De substantiis separatis. Treatise on separate substances.* [online] [2017–07–18] available on: <http://dhspriority.org/thomas/SubstSepar.htm#5>.

system from initial establishment of his starting points to the very conclusion. But it is a matter of fact that the act for Aristotle precedes matter as potency, since actuality precedes potentiality (Met. 1050a 7–10). Therefore, assertion that there are two roots of each created thing is a departure from Aristotle.

Hence, an answer to the question whether Aquinas was right to claim that Avicbron's Universal Hylomorphism departed from Aristotle cannot be definitive. Avicbron partly departed from Aristotle and partly adhered to him. He departed from Aristotle when he described creation using Neoplatonic terminology integrated in Aristotle's conceptual framework. On the other hand, we cannot definitely claim that he fully adhered to all Aristotle's rules of logic because he simplified them. This was also case of Aquinas who was not eventually occupied with a critique of Neoplatonic aspect of Avicbron's Universal Hylomorphism. Perhaps it was caused by the fact that his key principles were adopted mostly from Dionysius the Areopagite.

Avicbron, as well as Aquinas, proved to be thinkers capable of searching and finding original solution for the problems of being. Both knew Plato's (Plotinus's) and Aristotle's work, though in case of Avicbron, it was in the form typical for philosophy in Islamic world. Both left us similar idea of the role of philosophy and theology in solving these problems. I believe that Avicbron would agree with Aquinas that "there can be no real contradiction between what we discover through philosophical investigation and what we receive through philosophical investigation and what we receive through religious belief"⁶³. 

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⁶³ J. F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas. From Finite Being to Un-created Being*. Washington D. C., The Catholic University of America Press 2000, p. xxiii.

Together with Dov Goldstein are authors of the first Slovak translation of Keter Malkhut published under title *Koruna kráľovstva* in Prešov by publishing house of Michal Vaško (2003). In 2010 her monography *On the Crown of the Kingdom of Rabbi Shlomo ben Gabirol*, with a commentary, was published in Prague by Bergman publishing house and honored by a prize of the Rector of P. J. Šafárik University in Košice in 2011. *Avicbron's metaphysics* is the title of her last monography, published by Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice in 2015.

