The alleged activity of active intellect: A wild goose chase or a puzzle to be solved?[1]

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Summary

Trying to describe the activity of Aristotle's active intellect, we will sooner or later realize that we cannot find its right description, because Aristotle did not provide for one. He left us with many irreconcilable statements and questions with no answers. In the famous text *Aristotle's Two Intellects: a Modest Proposal* Victor Caston claims that Aristotle did not describe the activity, because there simply is no such activity and we should therefore identify *nous poietikos* with God, because God too does nothing. Trying to find this lacking description is like going on a wild goose chase – Caston argues. In my text I will show that his solution, albeit tempting, is in fact a kind of "dissolution" and that a wild goose chase, although for many doomed to failure, can be fruitful. I will do so by presenting three groups or clusters of views on active intellect which – I believe – are philosophically significant. Caston's proposal will be

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one of them, but not the privileged one. These three types of interpretations will hopefully provide us with an imagery that will help us somewhat come to terms with Aristotle's succinctness.

Keywords

nous, *nous poietikos*, *nous pathetikos*, soul, intellect, God, Deity, actuality, potentiality, philosophy of mind, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Franz Brentano, Victor Caston

1. The Riddle

In the history of mankind the most difficult and compelling questions have often turned out trivial in the end, whereas the apparently obvious ones have proven themselves really thought-provoking or even tricky. Usually we do not question facts because things seem transparent to us. From the objects and phenomena we encounter during our lives the ones we scrutinize or question are in minority. Surprisingly, the same holds for philosophical issues.

For example, let us take the case of active intellect, one of Aristotle's most influential ideas. For a large number of philosophers it is an axiom that the active intellect is called "active" in order to distinguish it from the passive intellect, i.e. the active intellect does something that the passive one does not do. But if an evil demon asked us what the specific function of *nous poietikos* was, most of us would be at least puzzled. "Why is it

called active?" – the demon would query. "Well ..." – one would answer – "because it *is* active". – "Fair enough" – the demon would go on tirelessly – "but what does it *do*?!" The interviewed philosopher would probably shrug his or her shoulders in light of this *ignotum per ignotum* case and feel rather confused. It is a known fact that nobody is fond of evil demons (it will hopefully be changed by the end of this text), as they ruin the *status quo*. However, at times, a daredevil turns up and he or she knows no fear. Below I will describe their pursuits to find the missing function.

2. Preliminaries

In the following text I will describe and analyze the long running controversy about the specific function of Aristotle's agent intellect, which – no doubt – is one of those that drive the Western philosophy. The problem originated when Aristotle, in his work *De Anima* (III 5), introduced the "second intellect". However, the name we use now and ascribe its authorship to Aristotle, "agent intellect" or – in Greek – *nous poietikos*, is a name proposed by his commentators (among them we find Theophrastus, St. Thomas, A. Bullinger, F. Brentano) and not Aristotle himself. The second intellect was called "agent" or "active" in contrast to the intellect introduced in the earlier chapter of *De Anima* (III 4), which is passive or receptive and therefore called *nous pathetikos*. In fact, both these intellects were "nameless" in Aristotle:

there was *nous* and the second *nous*. The function (*ergon*) of *nous pathetikos* also known as *nous dynamei* consists in receiving forms delivered by senses (although it has no bodily organ, it is "mixed" with the body) and thus enabling the cognitive process. We are facing a sort of paradox here, because we know what the passive intellect does (or at least: what it experiences[2]) and we do not know what the active one's activity is. So, as far as we are concerned, the passive one is paradoxically the active one, whereas the active one remains a mystery.

To make matters worse, Aryeh Kosman (Kosman 1992) claims that even the English name (let me add that such a nomenclature is a worldwide custom) traditionally ascribed to it is mistaken. He stresses the fact that the English word "active" comes from Greek *energeia* and the name *poietikos* – from *poieo*, which has a meaning similar to *prattein*. Both of them, *poieo* and *prattein* mean "do", "make", "produce" and are much more common, everyday words and have less "metaphysical weight" than one is inclined to think. And Kosman's intuition is right, as you can use the verb *poieo* in order to describe the usual activity of brushing your teeth or fixing a leaking roof. "Maker mind" does not sound as noble as "active mind", but this is in fact Kosman's proposal: to call it "maker" instead of "active" and – in my opinion – demythologize it a little. But, on the other hand how can

[2] As Franz Brentano put it in his work *Aristotle and his Worldview*: "*Denken ist eine Art Leiden*" ("*Thinking is a kind of suffering*"). What he had in mind was of course the greek word *pathein*, meaning *experiencing*.

"maker mind" be a dialectical counterpart to *nous dynamei*, that may be translated as "potential intellect" (see: Aristotle's theory of actuality and potentiality) if it does not mean something "*energeia* – like"? What we think and say about the active mind is usually elevated and we treat it as if it were an object with a special status. It is – I believe – at least partially due to the Christian interpretations which emphasize the fact (or hypothesis) that it was given to man by God. But does Aristotle explicitly say that it was in fact God's gift?[3] Does he say anything explicitly?

Aristotle did not provide us with a name for this special being, did not say what its origin was and did not specify its function. Had he been aware of the future confusion, would he have specified the case? We cannot be sure. Sometimes he was very accurate and some other time succinct and vague. Nevertheless, his idea of the second intellect which is *a fortiori* an attempt to make a division in the "area" of the intellectual soul, did revolutionize philosophy and establish an important issue for the future psychology and philosophy of mind. Before I start the quest for the specific function of Aristotle's second intellect, let me recapitulate what he really said in *De Anima* III 4 and III 5.

[3] There are in fact many interpretations of the term *theou dorema* from the *Nicomachean Ethics* X 8, 1178b. For example Franz Brentano (Brentano 1911) believes it to be a gift from a theist, merciful God, whereas the translation of *Nicomachean Ethics* by Daniela Gromska suggests that it is a gift, but from many gods and only metaphorically, because everybody has to earn this gift him- or herself. Brentano is right, but only grammar-wise, because in *Nicomachean Ethics* we have a multitude of gods, not one God.

The part III 4 is rather clear: the lower mind is "mixed" with the body, but not in the sense of having a bodily organ on its own, but because it is somehow connected with the senses.[4] And it is potentially everything that is thinkable like the senses are potentially everything that is sensible. It acquires the intelligible forms like the senses acquire the sensible ones. It is perishable[5] and it dies alongside the decomposing body because it is linked with the memory which necessarily "uses" the senses.

The following chapter (III 5), however, belongs to the most mysterious texts in the history of philosophy and – as Victor Caston put it (Caston 1999, p. 199) – "The fifteen lines which follow (430a 10–25) are some of the most controversial in his entire corpus: it is unclear whose intellect it is, how many there are, and exactly what it does". Because part III 4 is so elaborate and complex and part III 5 so concise and enigmatic, we are to some extent at the mercy of the definition by negation. When Aristotle ascribes α to *nous pathetikos* in III 4, we feel inclined to ascribe non α to *nous poietikos* from *De Anima* III 5. But this intuition cannot be satisfactory in the long run. For *nous pathetikos* and *nous poietikos* are both usually[6] ascribed to the same

[4] This is of course not entirely clear, however we should adapt a sort of unbiased perspective towards Aristotle's claims that are seemingly irreconcilable, like the claim that *nous pathetikos* is "mixed" with the body and the one that it in fact isn't (if it has no organ on its own), if we want to establish a reasonable starting point.

[5] See also: Aristotle, *De Anima* III 5.

[6] I will also analyse those theories which make a clear division between human and divine mechanism of thought and which place *nous poietikos* in the realm of the Divine.

soul or mechanism of thought (regardless of its ontological status on which I will dwell below) and this is why they should be "partners" rather than "rivals". Polarizing these two as simple opposites may be tempting, but it can in fact lead us astray.

All this seems very complicated and it is hard to find a good starting point here. In cases like these honesty is the best policy which – for a philosopher – usually amounts to ... *in extenso* quotation.

> Since just as in all of nature there is something which is
> matter to each kind of thing (and this is what is potentially
> all of them), while on the other hand there is
> something else which is their cause
> and maker by making them all,
> these being related as an art to its material
> so there must also be these differences in the soul.
> And there is a *nous* which is such as to become all things,
> and there is another which makes them all
> as a disposition, like light makes,
> for in a way light too makes potential colors into active colors.
> And this *nous* is separate, unaffected, and unmixed,
> it is in substance activity (*energeia*).
> For that which makes is always superior to that which is affected,
> and the principle [is always superior] to the matter.
> Knowledge in act is the same as its object.
> As potential it is prior in time in the individual
> but in the whole [it is] not in time;

and there is not when it is understanding
and when it is not understanding.
In separation it is just what it is,
and only this is immortal and eternal.
But we do not remember because this is unaffected,
whereas the affectable passive *nous* is perishable, and without this understands nothing.[7]

Aristotle states here that the whole of nature is governed by the dialectical relation between matter and form. They are related as material and art, so one of them is potential and the other active / actual. Matter is identical with potentiality and form – with actuality. If they govern the whole of nature, they have to govern the soul as well. It is worth noting that Aristotle includes soul to natural beings. One should have that in mind, especially while taking a closer look at the Christian theories according to which the soul is created by God and not by nature. It will also be important while analyzing Aristotle's claim that the intellectual soul "comes from without". What does it mean if we are reluctant to adopt the theist, Christian reading that favors the creationist solution?

There is a *nous* that is able to become all things and the other one – that makes all these things. As to the word "makes" we must be careful. Eugene T. Gendlin, the author of *Line by*

[7] Aristotle, *De Anima* III 5, [in:] *Line by Line Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima* by E.T. Gendlin, http://www.focusing.org/aristotle/Ae_Bk_1–2.pdf.

Line Commentary on Aristotle's <<De Anima>> which I am using here, obviously favors the same version of translating *nous poietikos* as Kosman, i.e. "maker mind". Although I find this reading justified, there are other possibilities like for example "productive mind" (Caston 1999), not to mention the classic "active mind" and "agent intellect". All these names have their advantages and disadvantages. And all of them imply certain interpretations of the being they designate. For instance the name "maker mind" suggests that the *nous* in question actually makes something (see above: *maker by making them all*), that it is alike efficient or moving cause, while the "active mind" suggests the actuality of beings which "use" this mind (i.e. humans), so it brings us to the analogy with Aristotle's final cause.[8] I suggest we should first describe what this second *nous* does and later ascribe a proper name to it.

Aristotle compares the second *nous* to light transforming potential colors into active ones, i.e. visible for the human eye (I believe this metaphor is way underestimated and I am going to explain this and expand the metaphor below). And this *nous* is separate (or: *separable* according to the recognized translators Smith and Hamlyn), unaffected, and unmixed. These three features are the most discussed ones. By "separate" (*choristos*) one can understand that it is something entirely different from the human being as such; this suggests not only the substantial

[8] There's also D.W. Hamlyn's "half-way option": *cause or agent because it makes them all*.

difference but also an alternative origin. By "unaffected" (*apathes*) – that it is for sure immaterial and thus cannot be altered or annihilated in any way the affectable things can. And "unmixed" (*amiges*) shall mean that it is not mixed with the body even in the way the lower *nous* is. We can trace this intuition back to Anaxagoras, for whom everything was in everything, i.e. everything was mixed with everything and the only unmixed thing was the *Nous* (being itself by itself). For Aristotle there are two unmixed things: God and *nous poietikos*. Aristotle also says that the *nous* [*poietikos*] is **in its substance activity** (*te ousia on energeia*). "In its substance"[9] means that this activity (*energeia*) is the very essence of *nous poietikos*.

Let me just notice that it reveals that Kosman was only partly right. He was – so to say – linguistically right, for *poieo* is better translated into "make", however the *energeia* is present in Aristotle's text, so for Aristotle there could not have been a clash between the semantics of these two words and the interpretations that they both imply: he used the word *poiein* to describe its action and *energeia* to describe its essence (this distinction is, of course, only verbal). So those philosophers who call this *nous* "active" or "agent intellect" (Caston 1999) may not be too precise when it comes to language, but their intuitions may be in fact apt, because they illustrate the fact that *nous dynamei* and *nous poietikos* presuppose each other like potentiality and actu-

[9] Or according to J.A. Smith and D.W. Hamlyn: *in its essential nature activity*.

ality do, whereas "maker mind" does not meet this requirement. Moreover – as we shall see below – it suggests creationism as well as God's provision and interference. I will go deeper into this while analyzing the theories of Victor Caston and Aryeh Kosman (I will concentrate on Caston however, because I agree with him, that Kosman (Kosman 1992) has only "flirted with it", see Caston 1999, p. 201).

Now, I will go on with the recapitulation of Aristotle's words. We shall see that the action and the essence of second intellect are the same (Victor Caston will use this circumstance to argue that *nous poietikos* is God, because in his opinion only God can display such unity of "features"[10]). Knowledge in act is identical with its object.[11] What is actual, is always prior to what is potential. What is potential, is only prior in time and with respect to a singular being, but on the whole, apart from time antecedence, it is not. Aristotle claims that the second intellect is what it is in separation and only this (the second intellect being what it is) is immortal and eternal. So, in separation it is *energeia* (essence, what it is).

He also says that it is not the case that mind is at some time thinking and at times not (Gendlin uses the word "understanding" to translate the Greek verb *noein*; both are justified, as well as "knowing" proposed by Caston) and that we do not remember

[10] The word "feature" with respect to God can only be used as a metaphor.

[11] This claim is often referred to as "Aristotle's intentionality", see: Caston 1998, pp. 249–298.

its action. What is surprising is the fact that in the Polish translation by Paweł Siwek one can read, that sometimes the mind is thinking and sometimes not. The original sentence goes as follows: *ouk hote men noei hote d'ou noei*, which means "it is **not** the case that it is sometimes thinking and sometimes not". Did the Polish translator make a mistake? Or could it be the case, that he had a hidden motif?[12] These mysterious statements about the *nous poietikos'* "sometimes thinking and sometimes not" will have to wait until I present the theories identifying it with God. In the meantime, Aristotle says that we don't remember this (*ou mnemoneuomen de*), where by 'this' he understands its action[13], because the second intellect is not affected, whereas the affected mind is perishable. Instead of interpreting the puzzling questions, let me now say that here "affected" means simply "connected with the senses". What is dependent on the senses is mortal, what is not – can outlive the dependent being.[14]

Considering all the puzzles presented above, there is no wonder, that so many philosophers proposed and are still proposing their interpretations of *nous poietikos*. There are, roughly speaking, three main groups of interpretations which have become the most popular over the years. These are:

[12] In *De Anima* III 4 (trans. J.A. Smith) we read: *Why mind is not always thinking we must consider later.*

[13] And some translators simply add this, like J.A. Smith: *we do not, however, remember its former activity*.

[14] Here, I use the word "being" in a wide sense and I do not ascribe any special meaning to it. It is rather a synonym for "something". The same will concern the word "entity" below.

1) Christian interpretations identifying *nous poietikos* with the immortal soul distributively implemented into every developing human being by God (e.g. St. Thomas, F. Brentano in his *Aristotelica* series);
2) interpretations identifying the *nous* in question with God (e.g. Alexander of Aphrodisias, Victor Caston and – to some extent – Aryeh Kosman);
3) modern "deflationary" accounts stating that *nous poietikos* is not a being (a singular something), but a noetic sphere or reservoir of mental acts (e.g. F. Brentano in his *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*[15], Patrick Macfarlane and Ronald Polansky). This third group has also inspired many scientists who occupy themselves with the cognitive science although this is – I believe – an implicit inspiration.

I will call these groups of interpretations G1, G2 and G3 respectively. The interpretations that belong to the first group (G1) seem least controversial, because they are prevalent in the tradition of so called Western philosophy. They are also an important component of Christian religiosity, so even non-philosophers are aware of them. This Christian Aristotelianism has become very common and widely approved over the centuries. I will try

[15] Brentano did not explicitly speak of *nous poietikos* there, as this is not one of his "Aristotelian books". He spoke of the soul. However, he was strongly influenced and driven by Aristotle and this is visible in all his works. This is why I include him here.

to show that despite its obvious advantages, there are some significant differences and that the first departure from "real" Aristotle takes place at the stage of the account of the embryogenesis. It is followed by further departures, among which the most important one is the relation of *nous poietikos* to theist, intervening, merciful God.

The second group (G2) is not so numerously represented and its fundamental thesis may seem astonishing to those who are better acquainted with the G1 paradigm and find it – so to say – natural. Nevertheless, it is based on interesting and to some extent credible premises which I will present below.

The third group (G3) seems to be the greatest departure from Aristotle but this impression vanishes once we free ourselves from the traditional time-honored readings. The "deflationary" readings will prove themselves to be genuinely Aristotelian.

One should also mention those philosophers who do not belong to any particular group and sometimes can be included to more than one: the Arab philosophers like Avicenna and Averroes, the historian of philosophy who tirelessly fought with Franz Brentano – Eduard Zeller, Aryeh Kosman, whom we could rate among the members of the second group, but not without a doubt *et al*.

3. The quest for active intellect's specific function

I will start the quest for *nous poietikos'* specific function by describing the standpoint of those who believe that *nous poietikos* does nothing. Is such a reading justified or is it – maybe a little bit too daring – commentary on the ineffectiveness of the manifold trials to find a satisfactory answer? I will present (and then question by giving my own account[16]) Victor Caston's interpretation from the text *Aristotle's Two Intellects: A Modest Proposal*.

The functions of the lower parts of human soul, that is the vegetative and sensitive ones, are easy to point out, whereas the function of the intellectual soul amounts to a challenge for many philosophers concerned with Aristotle's psychology. The intellectual soul is often referred to as the immortal soul or the divine seed. I find this second reference highly interesting and of value. That is why I will first describe it and then continue the presentation of Caston's position. The theory of the divine seed will be important for the interpretations from all the three groups listed above.

[16] This text isn't however to be treated as a full-blown polemic with Caston. This is why I am here discussing only the chosen issues, which I find crucial. My aim is to show his theory among others, as one out of many possibilities and not as a remedy for their ineffectiveness. In my text (Kamińska 2012) I stated that I disagree with Caston about the status of *nous poietikos*. This very text is where I can finally develop my standpoint and go deeper into this issue.

3.1. Theion sperma[17]

Aristotle defines human beings by concentrating on those factors that distinguish us from animals or so we are used to understand it. Humans believe to be animals, only better. For instance, let us take the famous concept of *animal rationale*, which is probably the best known definition of humans ever (or *ex aequo* with *zoon politikon*). "Animal" stands for genus (*genus proximum*) and "rationale" – for species (*differentia specifica*). Animals are equipped with perception (at least some of them), imagination and memory, but the distinctive faculty of understanding / thinking / knowing is reserved for humans only. And thus we obtain an animal equipped with intellect. But is this everything we get? I think there's a lot more. I will show that a slightly different (but complementary) reading is possible and – what is important – this new reading helps us establish the eponymous relation between Deity and humans. It goes as follows: because – in Aristotle's opinion – the intellect is divine, we get a compound or union of something animal and something divine. So, defining human beings consists not only in distinguishing them from animals, but also in bringing them nearer and comparing them with the Deity. This important aspect isn't usually exposed. I believe it is due to the rather influential G1 interpretations. In the G1

[17] The following deliberations on divine seed, human divinity and our affinity with God are to some extent a continuation and expansion of what I said in my text: Kamińska 2012.

paradigm the affinity with God, however present, cannot be too close. People are **only** similar to God and they cannot be treated as god-like.

The notion of the divine seed (Greek *theion sperma*) is present not only in Aristotle (*De Generatione Animalium* II 3) but also in Plato's *Timaeus* and *Symposium*.[18] In *Timaeus* (41 C, D), when the young gods create people, the Demiurge equips the newly formed creatures with the divine seeds that will help them lead pious life and thus achieve immortality.[19] People must not be created by Demiurge himself because that would make them perfect and that is not the desired state of affairs. People can only be **similar** to God. I will argue that this similarity is somehow "stronger" than the one present in G1 paradigm. This is why in this case I highlighted the word "similar" and above I highlighted "only". A person in G1 paradigm is sinful and week (see: St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book I). He or she needs help. In G1 people have to be good, humble and "follow the leader" whereas in ancient paradigm they are supposed to be independent, develop themselves and even transcend their human, earthy condition. And the divine seeds are the basis for the similarity with gods, the basis for deification. In the ancient paradigm

[18] It is also present in Stoic philosophy (see: *logos spermatikos* or in English "seminal logos" as the generative principle of the universe).

[19] "Now so much of them as it is proper to designate 'immortal', the part we call divine which rules supreme in those who are fain to follow justice always and yourselves, that part I will deliver unto you when I have sown it and given it origin".

humans are potentially gods (see: the Greek mythology or Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*).[20]

From Plato's *Timaeus* (73 B, C, D) we also learn that the divine seed is implemented in the brain (whereas the rest of the semen is stored in the bone marrow). And so we can infer that the *theion sperma* from Aristotle's *De Generatione Animalium* II 3 is the *nous / nous poietikos* which we encounter in *De Anima* (III 4, III 5). It can be the one "that has no bodily organ" (i.e. *nous*, including *nous pathetikos* and *poietikos*, III 4, III 5) as well as it can be the one "that comes from without" (agent intellect, DA III 5, GA II 3).[21]

In my opinion it is *nous poietikos* only, because *nous dynamei* a) is "mixed" with the mortal body, b) does not definitely distinguish us from animals (it would not distinguish us if there was no *nous poietikos*), c) does not establish our similarity to Deity.

This identification of *nous poietikos* with the divine seed and the auto-transcendence I described above bring me to the point where I shall propose G4, that is a cluster of views, according to which *nous poietikos* is a tool of an ethical transformation from human to something more (despite some similarities, I believe it would be too daring to speak about modern trans-humanism at this point). One can imagine this like moving from being *animal* to being *rationale*. And thus the definition of hu-

[20] See also Kamińska 2012.
[21] See also Kamińska 2012.

man being becomes dynamic. The climax is reached by exercising the divine part of humans, i.e. *nous poietikos*. A human being becomes god-like.[22]

Can he or she become god / God? Victor Caston would deny. But, on the other hand, he identifies *nous poietikos* with God. Let us see, how it is done.

3.2. Back to where it started

After having audaciously stated that *nous poietikos* does nothing, Victor Caston says that Aristotle did not in fact speak of two faculties in one soul (*nous dynamei* and *nous poietikos*), but what he wanted to show, was that there actually are two different species of *nous* – one belongs to humans (*nous dynamei*) and the other one (*nous poietikos*) is God (one cannot say that it belongs to God, because God is a unity and has no real attributes). Moreover, he believes that the whole tradition of commentary to Aristotle was mistaken and he finds the attempts at finding *nous poietikos'* specific function desperate and calls them "wild goose chase" (Caston 1999, p. 200). The person he feels related to or rather the type of interpretation he favors is the one inspired by Alexander of Aphrodisias (what is important is that Caston underlies the fact that such interpretations have not been common after Aquinas):

[22] The G4 interpretations, however, will not be disputed here at length, because it would transgress the bounds of this article.

> Alexander describes the so-called agent intellect as the "first cause, which is the cause and source of the being of all other things" at *De anima* 89.9–19, and the "first intellect" which "alone thinks nothing but itself" at *De intellectu* 109.23–110.3 (…). The identification of the second intellect with God is sufficient to distinguish this position from the more common "Averroistic" interpretation, according to which there is also only one second intellect, distinct from all human souls, but which is a separate substance and distinct from God himself. This much of the position can also be found in thinkers earlier than Averroes: not only in Avicenna, but still earlier in the Neoplatonist Marinus (...) and even before that, arguably, in Albinus … (Caston 1999, p. 201).

Caston's point is that the first lines of *De Anima* III 5 inform us that the difference in the soul which is analogous to the difference in nature exists not within every particular soul, but that there is a difference between one species of soul and another species of soul (see: Caston 1999, pp. 200, 205–207). But the heart of his argument is, in my opinion, the overlap between *nous poietikos'* features and God's "features" as described in *Metaphysics* Λ. Below, I will present this argument and try to show its "imperfections". They may seem insignificant at first glance, but – in the long run – they make the argument untenable.

Caston's line of argumentation goes as follows (Caston 1999, pp. 211–212). In *De Anima* III 5 *nous poietikos* is:

1) separate,
2) impassible,
3) unmixed,
4) in its essence actuality,
5) more honorable,
6) the same as the object of thought,
7) prior in time to capacity in general,
8) uninterruptedly thinking,
9) solely what it [essentially] is,
10) alone immortal and eternal,
11) the necessary condition of all thought.

And this is how God is described in *Metaphysics* Λ (Caston 1999, p. 212):

1) separated from sensibles,
2) impassible and unalterable,
3) without matter,
4) actuality,
5) most honorable,
6) the same as its object,
7) prior in time to capacity,
8) eternally thinking,
9) just its essence, thinking,
10) eternal,
11) the necessary condition of everything.

Aristotle says that there can only exist one such intellect, because it is actuality (*Metaphysics* 1074a). For Caston this is the final and crucial argument for the identification of *nous poietikos*

with God. However, I believe that *nous poietikos*, although it is actuality, has a potentiality ascribed to it – *nous dynamei* and together they build up the human mechanism of thought. For Caston that would be unacceptable, because he does not include *nous poietikos* into human psychology. Nevertheless, Caston's argument seems very convincing, because there can only be one Prime Mover. Two Prime Movers would be *contradictio in adiecto*. Moreover, the two groups of features he wants us to compare are delusively similar. However, at closer look, we will find some differences.

In my opinion the most problematic feature is the one described in point 5: "more honorable" with respect to *nous poietikos* and "most honorable" with respect to God. "More honorable" is the comparative and "most honorable" – the superlative degree. Aristotle uses the words *timioteron* (comparative) and *timiotaton* (superlative)[23], which in my opinion shall mean that *nous poietikos* is very similar to God, God-like in fact, but not identical with God. Otherwise, Aristotle would have used the same word in both cases.

Point 11 states that *nous poietikos* is the cause of every thought and that God is the source of everything. **Every thought** is not **everything** unless we prove it by adopting a proper ontology which Caston (and Aristotle all the more) does not do. Every theory works, but only in its own model. One should not

[23] In this case he also uses the word *ariston* (the best, the most perfect, the noblest), which he does not use with respect to *nous poietikos*.

try to force a theory without having provided for an appropriate model and that would require rather significant changes in Aristotle's ontology.

Point 7 informs us that *nous poietikos* is prior in time to capacity (potentiality) **in general** and God is prior to capacity. Let's go back to the quotation from *De Anima* III 5 above to see that Caston did not expose the whole of Aristotle's argument. This is what Aristotle says about his second intellect: "As potential it is prior in time in the individual but in the whole [it is] not in time". That shall mean that in time and with respect to singular beings the potentiality is prior in time while on the whole (in other words: "in general", "not in particulars"), apart from time antecedence – actuality is prior. For example: first we are born, then we grow, learn to read and write, become philosophers and thus – thanks to *nous poietikos* – achieve our *energeia*. So, in time and with respect to particulars (we are the particulars) potentiality is prior. But, in general, *sub specie aeternitatis* if one wishes, actuality is prior, because it is a goal of the whole development which structures all the actions that lead to it. *Nous poietikos* can also be prior when the human mechanism of thought is active (and, as I believe, it cannot be active all the time which is not only due to the fact that sometimes we sleep; but due to the fact that at times we simply don't think, because we don't feel like thinking). Normally, first we have to be given food for thought and this is *nous pathetikos'* work. God is beyond time, so He is always prior to every capacity. And *nous poietikos*, when active, transcends the limits of time.

Let me here propose a certain variation on Aristotle's metaphor of light that makes potential colors actual. Let us imagine, that we are looking for something in a dark, messy wardrobe or in a cluttered up basement. We need a flashlight that will "find" the desired object in the darkness. Otherwise all the objects will be indistinguishable. *Nous poietikos* will serve as the flashlight, the "ruler and guide" as Aristotle called it in the Xth book of *Nicomachean Ethics*. In my opinion, if we transform the metaphor of light into the more contemporary metaphor of flashlight, we will be able to say, that there exists a "switch". You can switch it on and think or switch it off and go to sleep. This would prove that the Polish translation of *ouk hote men noei hote d'ou noei* is to some extent "better", although it is linguistically mistaken. It is moreover in accordance with Aristotle's utterance from *De Anima* III 4, which I cited above, that reason not always thinks. Usually, when we comment on Aristotle's philosophy, we do not pay attention to the darkness surrounding the colors being actualized, so we neglect the whole potentiality underlying the work of *nous poietikos*. In everyday life we do not use *nous poietikos* a lot, e.g. when we wash dishes or drive to work or when we are reaching for a cup in a cupboard. But if there was no electricity and we had to find one specific cup among a dozen of different cups, finding the right one would require some more advanced actions ... And *nous poietikos* is responsible for the so called higher thinking (of course, it would be advisable to exchange cups for intellectual / moral decisions or anything nobler). In order to proceed this thinking,

we have to activate the right tool. And in my opinion this activation is the really mysterious part. How do we activate it? Why do we need one power to activate another power (if *poietikos* and *pathetikos* stand to each other like actuality and potentiality)? And do we have to first activate *nous poietikos* deliberately? Or maybe it just happens and we cannot explain how? The second option seems more reliable as we do not deliberately decide to think (except for specific situations), but we simply think. Although Victor Caston would be against this solution (in his opinion *nous poietikos* cannot be a magical "problem solver" or *deus ex machina*), I have decided to adopt it as the one that quite objectively reflects our experience.[24] I think this is what Aristotle wanted to express by saying that we do not remember *nous poietikos'* action. This statement does not have to apply to the past only as the word "remember" would suggest. Aristotle's *ou mnemoneuomen* is in the present tense.[25]

Going back to Caston: point 6 from his list of the corresponding features informs us about the identity of the intellect with its object. In my opinion *nous poietikos* is identical with God **only** when it thinks, to be precise: when a human being thinks by virtue of *nous poietikos*. This contemplation is the one thing that enables and establishes *bios theoretikos* (see: *Nicomachean Ethics* X). *Nous poietikos* and God have the same object

[24] It is the experience that is mysterious, not the account of it. I want to stress however, that I am not proposing any type of cognitive closure here.

[25] Caston 1999 also proposes his account of this case.

of thought and this object is God. God thinks only about God[26] (Aristotle's God has no knowledge about the sublunary world), whereas humans think about many other things, but among these – God is always the best and most honorable one. The distinction between subject and object is possible only with respect to people. We ascribe it to God merely metaphorically.

What is essential to Caston's argumentation is the exclusion of *nous poietikos* from human psychology. I find such an operation inappropriate and causing serious consequences. Let me explain why.[27] If we identify agent intellect with God, we either lose the criterion of differentiating between humans and God as, according to this interpretation, every human being in fact becomes God (if every person possesses a private *nous poietikos*; if *nous poietikos* is **in** human mechanism of thought); or we lose the criterion (*differentia specifica*) of distinguishing people from the lower species of animals if we are reluctant to equate humans with God. The non-identification of humans and Deity provides us with *nous pathetikos* only, i.e. *nous pathetikos* is the climax of human mechanism of thought in this case, while *nous poietikos* is simply taken away from us. And *nous pathetikos*, as we stated above, is not only decomposable but also "mixed" with the body, for it is somehow addicted to senses. And because Caston identifies agent intellect with God and does not

[26] And this is exactly what Aristotle's term *noeseos noesis* means.

[27] I used the the following argument in my text Kamińska 2012, but in a slightly different context, namely in the context of creationism vs. traducianism discussion.

equate God with humans, some very important issues remain beyond our reach. These are: immortality[28] (*nous pathetikos* is mortal), affinity with God and personal development. Although G1 commentators would probably have good reasons to disagree, the impossibility of individual immortality does not seem to be an issue here, because Aristotle was rather in favor of the immortality of the species understood as an infinite reproduction. However, the resignation from affinity with God and personal development understood in terms of theoretical contemplation (i.e. *bios theoretikos* and *eudaimonia*) make Caston's ideas, even the "earthy immortality"[29], rather dubious. Caston, nevertheless, speaks of our similarity to God, but this relation amounts to making humans merely a link in the teleologically ordered chain of beings (How can the potential mind be striving after anything if it is passive?). This natural chain consists of lower species like plants and animals striving after the Deity or maybe it would be better to say: emulating It (Caston seems to be using these words interchangeably). The word "striving" suggests that there is some conscious will, which we would rather reluctantly ascribe to fauna and flora. On this reading, the special status of human beings vanishes into thin air. This can be interpreted as diminishing, because we are not *animal rationale* any more. We are *animal quasi rationale* at the most.

[28] For an account of so-called *taxonomical separability* see Caston 1999, p. 207–211.

[29] See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1177b.

Caston's theory is very bold and thus thought-provoking. But the identification of *nous poietikos* with God erases human special, in fact divine status which was crucial for Aristotle, especially because – as I believe – atheist (meaning simply *non theist*) interpretations of Aristotle's Deity, according to which one is supposed to earn one's status, are much more proper than the theist ones (which are justified but only to some extent – below I will show their flaws as well as good reasons for adopting them).

Now, I will present these theories that save the special status of human beings without adopting the aforementioned identification and without adopting theist God. So, as we can see, I am moving to G3 "deflationary" interpretations and leaving the G1 "religious" ones waiting. These "deflationary" solutions aren't so spectacular as Caston's proposal, but – as I said above – they will prove themselves to be genuinely Aristotelian.

3.3. The Really Modest Proposal

Victor Caston advertised his proposal as "modest". In my opinion, the really modest one is the one proposed by Patrick Macfarlane and Ron Polansky in their text *God, the Divine and <<Nous>> in relation to <<De Anima>>*.[30] Caston believes that his theory is economical, because he – so to say – "re-

[30] I advertised their solution in my text Kamińska 2012, but in a different context (origin of the intellect, creationism vs. traducianism discussion).

moves" one entity as if he was using Ockham's razor. He seems to be a supporter of the thesis that less is more. But, as we have seen, this reduction comes at a price, because it demands that we should adopt additional premises (probably redefine *nous pathetikos*) in order to save the cohesion of the theory. Macfarlane and Polansky, as we shall see, do not remove any entity.[31] They do not add any either, but they change the ontological status of the entity in question. They also believe that the identification of mind and God is inappropriate:

> Clarifying Aristotle's account of mind should be easy, since what could be more readily intelligible to us than our very own sort of being, despite the surprising disagreements among interpreters? In DA III 4 he says that this treatment will consider what the difference of mind is and how it ever comes to think (429a 12–13). Most characteristic of mind is permitting us to think all things. This is Aristotle's basic assumption that enables him to begin to understand mind as differing from sense (see 429a 13–22). Whereas each sense has a limited range of sensible objects, mind allows for thinking all things. Hence mind can be nothing in actuality before we think, and it must not involve a bodily organ, as is the case with sense. Possession of mind is having the *possibility* for thinking all things, and to maintain this, Aristotle removes any obstructions to the full range of thought. To anticipate

[31] I use the word "entity" in the same non-technical sense as the word "being" above.

> where we are going, since mind is fundamentally *potentiality*, it is completely inappropriate to say that God is mind, or even that God is wise (will Aristotle's God think all things?). Mind, knowledge, and wisdom are potentialities. Therefore it is impious, if unintentionally so, to speak of God as Divine Mind, or to refer to God as knowledgeable and wise. Strictly, mind does not think, but a human thinks by way of having mind (Macfarlane and Polansky 2009, p. 116).

We cannot identify mind with God for two reasons. First of all, mind is partly potential (*nous dynamei* is potential and *nous poietikos* actualizes it whenever it thinks / we think). Second of all, ascribing potentiality to God is impious (*a fortiori* Caston's proposal can be seen as to some extent disrespectful[32]). This is a very popular and genuinely Aristotelian intuition, that knowledge about the sublunary world would disturb God's perfection. Why should God have knowledge about anything that is inferior? For Aristotle the Prime Mover is not supposed to "move" anything himself. The whole idea of unmoved mover (or movers, because there are 55 altogether in Aristotle's ontology) amounts to being a goal for the things which strive after Him and thus achieve their perfection. They are not supposed to do anything for God, e.g. to please him (as is the case with

[32] Not only to humans, what I was trying to prove above, but also – and maybe first of all – to Aristotle's Deity. Macfarlane and Polansky's text however was not written as a *refutatatio* of Caston's theory. It is me who juxtaposes these two interpretations of Aristotle.

G1 interpretations). They owe him nothing and he owes them nothing.[33]

Let us go back to the ontological status of *nous poietikos*. As we have learned from Macfarlane and Polansky and from what I have said above, *nous poietikos* can be divine or god-like, but it cannot be God. In light of Aristotle's claim, that it is separate, unaffected, unmixed and in its essence actuality as well as Macfarlane's and Polansky's definition of the divine (as aiming at the *telos*), the authors suggest that it cannot be a being in a traditional sense, i.e. it cannot be an actual something in our head. Neither can it be a material being and / or a substratum for accidents.

> What Aristotle is suggesting by his choice of imagery is that the so-called "agent intellect" is just our knowledge that allows us to think the things that we know. Knowledge plays the role of moving cause for thinking (Macfarlane and Polansky 2009, p. 117).

By "imagery" the authors mean the famous comparison of *nous poietikos* to light, I have described above, that transforms potentially visible colors into the ones we actually see. They imagine *nous poietikos* as a reservoir of knowledge which we can use. It is the moving cause for thinking because it moves in the same way as the unmoved movers do. It is in fact one of them: it makes people crave for perfection and strive after knowledge, and *a fortiori* their own *entelechia* (what else could be the *entel-*

[33] More on this subject: Kamińska 2012.

echia of *animal rationale*?). The *nous* they characterized as potential must be *nous dynamei* – "the things that we know". But these things are somehow "asleep" or "on standby" and we need to actualize them like the light actualizes potential colors. We can also, once more, compare it to looking for something in the dark and using a flashlight to find the thing we are looking for in the darkness (as I proposed above). If we want to think our thoughts, we have to shed some light on them. These thoughts are like books on library shelf – we do not use them all at once, but we can take one from the shelf whenever we want. Macfarlane and Polansky use the word "knowledge" to describe both: potential knowledge and actual thinking about the things we know, which only reinforces the hypothesis that *nous pathetikos* and *nous poietikos* are like potentiality and actuality. Moreover, people learn. They learn themselves and they learn from other people. This is, according to Macfarlane and Polansky, what Aristotle meant when he claimed that *nous poietikos* was separate. That this reservoir of knowledge is not only a private property but also something we share with others (a common body of knowledge[34]). And this body of knowledge is an impersonal sort of immortality. There is no immortality in the sense of afterlife (a place, where we or our souls go after the death of the body), but the immortality is achieved by virtue of our thoughts being preserved in this noetic sphere.[35]

[34] Neither of these terms: "reservoir" or "body" of knowledge do aspire to be technical terms. I use them interchangeably.

[35] The same case as with "body" and "resrvoir".

So, we get all the things we wanted (following in Aristotle's footsteps), and which Caston's theory could not give us: individual development, special status and a sort of immortality. Every individual *nous poietikos* interacts with others and thus individual reservoirs / bodies of knowledge meet and melt with the others.

Paradoxically, the relation between humans and Deity is easier to obtain on grounds of this theory than on grounds of Caston's doctrine. Although *nous poietikos* is – according to Caston – God, it does not belong to humans. And, as I have shown, *nous pathetikos* is incapable of establishing this relation. So, Caston's reading excludes this relation instead of including it into human privileges. Polansky and Macfarlane stress the difference between us and God, but their definition of divinity based on teleological development enables us to say that under certain conditions a person is divine. By these certain conditions I mean thinking about what is noble and divine and thus achieving a sort of divinity available for humans. This divinity translates itself into immortality. And what is interesting about this account of immortality is that it is possible without a soul conceived as a substratum.[36]

Such an account of immortality seems very modern and daring. That is why one will be confused when one realizes that

[36] The lack of substratum solves one more problem, i.e. the problem of the origin of *nous poietikos* which has been problematic for many philosophers. And the atmosphere around the creationism vs. traducianism argument is boiling-hot even nowadays.

it isn't new at all and that Franz Brentano proposed exactly the same sort of thing in his *Psychology from Empirical Standpoint* over one hundred years ago (1874). Although he was an ardent scholastic-Aristotelian, he departed from defining psychology as the science of the soul (see: *De Anima*) and he proposed the new definition: science of the mental phenomena. And at the very beginning of his *opus magnum* he says that although there is no substratum for these mental phenomena (soul is not an object), immortality is still possible. What is even more puzzling is that Franz Brentano did not interpret Aristotle in this modern way. Not only did he sustain the definition of psychology as the science of soul (German *Seelenlehre*) in his Aristotelian works[37] (1862–1911), but he also took the "substratum – approach", which is astonishing because even Aristotle wasn't this conservative. In fact, Aristotle wasn't conservative at all and all the interpretations of his psychology, I presented above, are a great proof for this. The really conservative and "substratum-oriented" one was St. Thomas. And Brentano was truly under his spell.

[37] Franz Brentano's Arisotelian Works are: *Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seienden nach Aristoteles* (1862), *Die Psychologie des Aristoteles, insbesondere seine Lehre vom nous poietikos* (1867), *Über den Creatianismus des Aristoteles* (1882), *Aristoteles' Lehre vom Ursprung des menschlichen Geistes* (1911), *Aristoteles und seine Weltanschauung* (1911).

3.4. Back to the future
Why Aristotle was ahead of St. Thomas?

In this section I will describe the G1 interpretations of *nous poietikos*. As I said above, they are the "classic" ones, the ones we are somehow accustomed to. I believe that for many philosophers Christian Aristotelianism is the real Aristotelianism. Nevertheless, I think that there are many significant differences and that they are visible as early as at the stage of conceptions of human embryogenesis. Although the main concepts of the generation of human beings have remained unchanged (division of the soul into three parts: vegetative, sensible and intellectual one; the delayed appearance of the intellectual soul), the alterations made by St. Thomas are meaningful. I will now shed some light on Aquinas's understanding of the origin of human life.[38]

The natural body has to be informed by an intellectual soul in order to constitute a human being[39]. Some interpreters say that the rational soul in question is *nous* (meaning both: *nous pathetikos* and *nous poietikos*) and others, among whom I count myself, that it is *nous poietikos* which – as Aristotle put it – "comes from without". There are also interpreters who sometimes speak of *nous* (meaning the two parts) and sometimes *nous poietikos*

[38] Besides consulting his *Summa Theologiae* it is also advisable to see what the contemporary authors have to say, e.g. Eberl 2005, pp. 381–382.

[39] For a discussion of Aristotelian and Thomistic embryology see also Kamińska 2012.

and in this regard really resemble Aristotle, e.g. Franz Brentano in his work *Aristotle and his Worldview*. Because I identified *nous poietikos* with the divine seed, I will stick to my opinion, although it is not crucial in this case.

And the case is: both, Aristotle and Thomas agree that when the natural body is ready (*perfecta dispositio corporis*), it is animated by the rational soul. Because the word "animation" also suggests becoming a living thing (which is the role of vegetative soul that we share with plants and animals), it is now popular (and justified) to speak of "hominization". Hominization shall mean the moment when intellectual soul appears and we can call the developing creature *animal rationale*. The word "animation" is thus reserved for the lower parts of the soul (animation makes us animals, so to say). Aristotle said that *nous poietikos* is separate, unaffected and unmixed (*De Anima* III 5) and he also called it divine (*De Generatione Animalium* II 3). That is why the G1 interpreters could infer that it was in fact created, given and incarnated by God. When the natural body in mother's womb achieves *perfecta dispositio corporis*, God intervenes and places the intellectual soul inside it and thus creates an immortal individual. And He does it with respect to every particular individual. The immortal soul is supposed to outlive the decomposing body. The "natural" consequence of such a division is the opinion that the soul is simply good / noble and the body – depending on the philosophical era – bad, very bad or at least significantly worse than the soul. That would be unacceptable for Aristotle, because the Antiquity did respect the body. Not only

as a God's gift, like the Middle Ages did, but as something valuable in itself and thus worth respect (Plato's *Symposium* will be a *locus classicus* in this case). So, in Antiquity the whole human being is related to what is divine (when he or she develops himself or herself) and in Middle Ages – only the soul. So there must be a conflict inside a human being if he or she does not come from one "source". Moreover, he or she does not develop the rational part for his or her own sake but for the sake of God, who is the author, the maker and the owner of this rational part. Aristotle would not only disapprove of this, but he would not understand it at all (the same concerns the concept of *creatio ex nihilo*). Apart from the strong dualism, there is one more consequence that can be tagged as unwanted on Aristotelian ground. And the consequence is called theism. Aristotelian Prime Mover has been transformed into God-the-Father, who is good, omniscient, omnipotent and merciful. Sometimes He is referred to as the Teacher. From Aristotle's *noeseos noesis* He becomes a person. He is the best possible person, of course, but still a person. First of all, the Antiquity did not know the term "person", however there was a term "human" (*aner*, *anthropos*). Second of all, *noeseos noesis* was good but as an aim of striving, not as a person displaying good features like the concern for the sublunary world for instance; it was **the** Good. Moreover, omniscience does not mean knowledge about the whole universe, but a self-contained, self-centered act of thought (to which *nous poietikos* can become similar in specific conditions described above). And omnipotence seems rather controversial, because

why would Aristotle's God do anything, e.g. create the world? That would disturb His dignity. Moreover, according to Aristotle the world was eternal. And so was our species. The act of *creatio* or *creatio ex nihilo* was not an issue in ancient paradigm. The theist interpretations are – as I believe – based on the conflation of the two ideas which were separate in the Greek world: the Prime Mover and the Olympic gods. The first one is simply the best "thing" one cane think about and the Olympic gods are similar to humans, which means they are not flawless, and interact with them. When we combine these two concepts, we will obtain the perfect entity that interacts with us during our life in the sublunary world as well as after the death of our bodies.

Here I would like to make the statement that I am not assessing any kind of religion or a belief system. I am only trying to examine, to what extent the philosophical (!) doctrine of St. Thomas and his famous follower Franz Brentano was in accordance with Aristotle.

One can easily understand, why and how St. Thomas adopted such a standpoint towards Aristotle. His doctrine was appropriate for the times he lived in. But why did Franz Brentano adopt this position? This question seems difficult and puzzling especially in light of the modern, "deflationary" theory of soul which he proposed in his *opus vitae – Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. From our perspective it seems even enigmatical, that somebody can propose an advanced, ingenious and really innovative theory in 1874 and then come up with something entirely rooted in the thirteenth century scholastic philos-

ophy in 1911. The possible answer to this jigsaw is that Franz Brentano was aware of the fact that Aristotle was incoherent and that calling him a systematic philosopher was actually an abuse and a serious mistake. Maybe he seemed systematic against the background of his contemporaries, but even this hypothesis seems unreliable. And because Brentano believed himself to be Aristotle's third son (besides Eudemus and Theophrastus), he must have felt challenged to save at least the appearance of cohesion. Brentano, following St. Thomas and probably Friedrich Adolph Trendelenburg and Franz Jakob Clemens too, claimed that *nous poietikos* is a part of every individual human mechanism of thought and that every human being possesses his or her active intellect. This intellect, according to Brentano, is responsible for the actualization of the potentiality (*nous pathetikos*), i.e. for the fulfillment of human thinking and thus achieving *bios theoretikos*, happiness, God's provision and individual immortality. The first two terms: *bios theoretikos* and happiness are genuinely Aristotelian terms, the second pair: God's provision and individual immortality are Brentanian and / or Christian.

Apart from his own kinship with Aristotle (which should not be taken as a strong philosophical argument), Brentano also emphasized our kinship with the Deity (Brentano 1867, p. 59), that was based upon *nous poietikos* conceived as divine and thus immortal.

I will now concisely present Brentano's theory of afterlife based on the immortality of *nous poietikos*. Franz Brentano (Brentano 1911) did believe that this world (*Diesseits*) was nothing

more than a preparation for the afterlife (*Jenseits*), where every soul is supposed to live a happy life, even the ones that had sinned during their earthy life. What is interesting, it is that these souls do not live on as beings in the traditional sense, but rather as judgments / opinions / self-assesments, so Brentano somehow changes the ontological status of the intellectual soul: from "a being in the head" to a thought / judgment / psychic phenomenon. If one had led a good and pious life – he or she will obtain a good self-evaluation and if one had led a sinful life, well … it will look more or less the same, because he or she will necessarily be converted at the very moment of the bodily death. As we can see, it is a very traditional, in fact religious reading. The most important and potentially innovative thing is, in my opinion, the idea **self**-evaluation, but unfortunately Brentano did not develop it. His concept of afterlife, although interesting, seems rather vague and one can wonder why he did not adapt his view from *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* to his inquiries on *nous poietikos*, which in comparison to his Thomistic reading looks very attractive and shifts Brentano from G1 to G3 and which proves my hypothesis about G3 interpretations of *nous poietikos* being genuinely Aristotelian right.

The theory of immortality of the soul presented in the first pages of *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* goes as follows: despite there is no substantial soul (as Brentano was among those who proclaimed "psychology without the soul"), there's still a possibility for the chain of our noetic acts to live forever. This chain of noetic acts can be easily compared to the body of

knowledge or reservoir of psychic acts I presented above and – since there is no underlying soul – we can count this idea among the "deflationary" ones. Unfortunately, this vague statement is all we get from Brentano and this is – to be honest – as little as Aristotle gave us in his *De Anima* III 5. This is why all hypotheses here can be somewhat premature. Brentano mentioned the possibility of the continued existence of mental acts at the beginning of his *opus vitae*, but unfortunately did not develop this issue and – what is worse – did not finish the book in question. We know that Brentano wanted to continue this work and that its 6th book was supposed to be devoted to the immortality of soul (Rollinger 2012). Maybe in the sense of non-substantial soul? – one could query. If he had introduced the idea of non-substantial soul into his studies on Aristotle's psychology, philosophy of mind would be a hundred years ahead. And so would be the interpretations of *nous poietikos*. I am aware of the fact that this can be a somewhat audacious thought. Unfortunately, as we learn from manuscripts of the 6th book of his *Psychology...*, my hypothesis is a pure science-fiction, as Brentano remained faithful to the substratum-view on the soul.

There is also a hypothesis which some scholars advocate, that the theory of immortality of the soul and the theory of soul itself suggested in *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* weren't something Brentano really believed, but in fact something he wrote in order to free himself of the label of a Thomistic philosopher and thus get the university position in Vienna, which he needed after having had resigned from his professorship

in Würzburg due to his conflict with Catholic Church (about papal infallibility). But this is a whole different story …

* * *

Despite the two thousand years that have passed, Aristotle still seems fresh and inspiring, whereas St. Thomas view's on active mind may seem a little bit outdated. Aristotle's philosophy still enables manifold interpretations, Thomas' – only one type of it.[40] We always gain something and loose something: this is the price we pay for getting rid of ambiguities. St. Thomas gained coherence (by "putting *nous poietikos* into our heads") and thus lost freedom of further interpretations. To some extent, the same thing may have happened with Franz Brentano's account of *nous poietikos*.

In my opinion, the best way of coping with Aristotle's incoherence is to accept it (like Eric Voegelin did in his work *Plato and Aristotle*, Voegelin 1999), because I don't think anyone will ever be able to find out what Aristotle really meant. And that makes him so fascinating.

If the evil demon asked St. Thomas or Brentano what *nous poietikos* did, they would give an elaborate and unambiguous answer. The demon would have to retreat. *I have no further questions* – he would say. But is this what we really want as philosophers? Wouldn't it be better if the demon still had something to do?

[40] There are of course many versions of Thomistic reading, but it is still a Thomistic reading and some of its elements remain irreplaceable.

4. Much ado about nothing? Conclusion

Let us imagine somebody who has never heard of Aristotle and they read this very paper. They would probably be perplexed by the fact that Aristotle said hardly nothing about *nous poietikos* and philosophers are still tirelessly and – to be honest – hopelessly trying to come to terms with this. They would of course be right. But only common-sensically right. Because philosophy is not about the answers. It is about questions. And Aristotle proved himself to be the author of the most inspiring questions that won't let us put our concerns to sleep.

If I were to give an appropriate name to *nous poietikos*, I would be in trouble. I would say, that they are all legitimate. But the best is the "original", Greek one, because it not only includes them all, but also reflects the manifold, only seemingly dormant potentialities better than any other of them.

We may never be able to satisfactorily answer Aristotle's questions as such and thus finish his work or fill in the gaps in *Corpus Aristotelicum*. But if we could do this, we would have nothing left to do. And the quest to find the right function of *nous poietikos* is only one of many Aristotelian themes that, no doubt, drive our civilization. And so, the wild goose chase may be uncertain and tedious, but I do not believe it to be fruitless.

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