

The Scholastic Context of the Boethius Commentary by Nicholas Trevet¹

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I

By far the most popular commentary on Boethius' *Consolatio Philosophiae* in the Middle Ages was that of the Dominican friar Nicholas Trevet, written in about 1300.² The work has come down to us in more than a hundred manuscripts. It often accompanied vernacular translations, and was even translated into the vernacular itself. Many translators, most notably Chaucer, had a copy of Trevet's commentary on their desk when composing their vernacular versions of the *Consolatio*; and traces of it can be found in the *Canterbury Tales*. The complicated manuscript traditions of the Latin commentaries of the *Consolatio* in the later Middle Ages have still to be unravelled, but one thing is clear: Trevet's commentary was the late-medieval Boethius commentary par excellence, and exercised considerable influence on the first printed commentaries by Pseudo-Aquinas and Badius Ascensius.

It is no surprise then that scholarly attention has come mainly from historians of (vernacular) literature.³ They have focused in particular on

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²In this article Trevet's commentary is quoted from the unpublished edition of the late E.T. Silk, *Nicholas Trevet on Boethius. Expositio Fratris Nicolai Trevethii Anglici Ordinis Predicatorum super Boecio De Consolatione* (henceforth abbreviated as Trevet, *super Boecio*, ed. Silk). On the date of Trevet's article see B. S. Donaghey, 'Nicholas Trevet's Use of King Alfred's Translation of Boethius, and the Dating of his Commentary', *The Medieval Boethius. Studies in the Vernacular Translations of the 'De Consolatione Philosophiae'*, ed. A. J. Minnis, Cambridge 1987, 1-31, esp. 3-11. The *Consolatio* is quoted from L. Bieler's edition, Turnhout 1984 (Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, 94), translations are taken from the Loeb edition, *Boethius: The Theological Tractates, The Consolation of Philosophy*, ed. and transl. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand and S. J. Tester, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1973.

³Several essays (where more bibliography may be found) in the following volumes deal with Trevet and the vernacular traditions: *Boethius: His Life, Thought, and Influence*, ed. M. T. Gibson, Oxford 1981; *The Medieval Boethius*, ed. A. J. Minnis; *Chaucer's 'Boece'*

Trevet's place in the Boethian commentary tradition, the relationship with his predecessor William of Conches, his influence on French and English translators (such as Chaucer, Robert Henryson and John Walton), and his popularity in other vernacular traditions. Although these studies have greatly extended our knowledge of Trevet's importance for the vernacular traditions, the vantage point of literary historians has also resulted in a rather one-sided interpretation and sometimes inadequate assessments of Trevet's scholarly achievements. Thus Trevet was long considered a mere plagiarist who was happy to quote extensively from the work of William of Conches, and only chose to turn his back on the *commentator* when the latter was propounding Neoplatonic doctrines or giving Neoplatonic interpretations of Boethius' words, which Trevet preferred to replace by his own Aristotelian views. The first scholar who seriously advocated this view was Pierre Courcelle in his influential book on the *Consolatio* in the Middle Ages, and he was followed by many scholars for whom Trevet was at best an unoriginal mind and at worst a mere plagiarist.⁴

This view of Trevet as plagiarist and anti-Platonist has become untenable. It has recently been shown that Trevet's alleged hostility to the Platonic tradition of his predecessor rested on a well-secured myth.⁵ He displayed a readiness to apply the principle of charity to his author, providing the Platonic context of the *Consolatio* with a coherent interpretation. Trevet even sided with Plato against William of Conches on the status of prime matter, and followed Plato and the Pythagoreans against Aristotle on the issue of the harmony of the spheres.⁶ Trevet was simply practising what most of his predecessors had done: revising the commentary tradition and recasting it in the mould of his own age. His entire approach was in line with that of William of Conches and Pseudo-William (a thirteenth-century reviser of William). They were all interested in extracting the *sententia*, the deep meaning, contained in texts such as Plato's *Timaeus* and Boethius' *Consolatio*, which meaning could be co-ordinated with the *sententiae* of other authorities. The three commentators agreed in their interpretative strategies, and also in their conclusions to a considerable extent, despite all the obvious differences

and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius, ed. A. J. Minnis, Cambridge 1993 (Chaucer Studies, 18); and the articles quoted below.

⁴Pierre Courcelle, *La Consolation de Philosophie dans la tradition littéraire. Antécédents et postérité de Boèce*, Paris 1967, 318-319.

⁵A. J. Minnis and Lodi Nauta, 'More Platonico loquitur: What Nicholas Trevet really did to William of Conches', *Chaucer's 'Boece'*, ed. Minnis, 1-33; for echoes of Courcelle's views see the works quoted in the notes on pp. 2-3 of this article.

⁶*Ibidem*, 19-20, and Mary Louise Lord, 'Virgil's *Eclagues*, Nicholas Trevet, and the Harmony of the Spheres', *Mediaeval Studies* 54 (1992), 186-273, on 260; see below.

of detail and emphasis.⁷

Since the traditional picture of Trevet as plagiarist and anti-Platonist has been discredited, it remains to place Trevet more firmly in his own time, and to see how precisely he recast the commentary tradition in the mould of his own age. To do so, we must look more closely at the scholastic debates that were carried on at the turn of the century when Trevet composed his Boethius commentary (about 1300).

This is a task which is long overdue considering the inaccuracies perpetrated by a few scholars who, not content to copy Courcelle's negative judgements, have attempted to say something on Trevet's debt to current scholastic debates. Mark Gleason, for example, concludes his article on Chaucer's use of Trevet by saying that 'Trevet's analyses of Boethian cosmology and psychology, traditional though they may be, suggest a depth and complexity in the commentary which scholars have completely ignored'.⁸ His article, however, itself ignores this depth and complexity of the commentary itself, and focuses on Chaucer's use of Trevet.

Another critic, Brian Donaghey, in an article on Trevet's use of the Old English translation of King Alfred states correctly that in 'the later books [IV and V] the topics and arguments he [Trevet] brings forward fit in very well with the current debate at Oxford in the 1290s'.⁹ He goes on to list these topics: the theory of individuation; the distinction between God's *potentia absoluta* and His *potentia ordinata*; the relationship between soul and body, and between the faculties of the soul and its essence; human intellect, and a 'long discussion of the

⁷Minnis and Nauta, 'More Platonico loquitur', resp. 3, 31 and 18.

⁸Mark Gleason, 'Clearing the Fields: Towards a Reassessment of Chaucer's Use of Trevet in the *Boece*', *The Medieval Boethius*, ed. Minnis, 89-105, on 104. Gleason's interpretations of the positions of William of Conches and Nicholas Trevet in his 'Nicholas Trevet, Boethius, Boccaccio: Contexts of Cosmic Love in *Troilus*, Book III', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, NS 15 (1987), 161-188 do not inspire confidence either when he claims, inter alia, that for William, 'the universe is a sacramental projection of divine thought; for him, God is always the chief inhabitant of earth, and the mundane realities of nature possess a symbolic value that makes them both beautiful and good' (p. 165 echoing Chenu, but see the contribution on William in this volume); that 'Trevet's interpretation seems to emphasize the autonomy of creation, unlike the interpretation of the 'Platonists' [such as William] that emphasizes the active influence of God in the world' (p. 167; however, on p. 166 it is said that in William's interpretation, 'the Holy Spirit's role in history is in danger of being reduced to presiding over cosmic evolution'); that Nicholas 'differs radically from William' (p. 166) but also that 'they agree broadly in their interpretations' of III m. 9 (p. 168).

⁹Donaghey, 'Nicholas Trevet's Use', 9-10.

primacy of the will over the intellect in Bk V prose 2'. However, only in one instance does Donaghey attempt to substantiate this claim when he suggests that Trevet's comment on Fate `has... a reminiscence of the doctrine of coefficient of God with man in the act of willing, which was soon to be stated emphatically by Archbishop Bradwardine [in his *De Causa Dei*] at Oxford'.¹⁰ Bradwardine, however, who finished his *De Causa Dei* in 1344, that is more than 40 years after Trevet's Boethius commentary, can hardly count as someone who took part in the `current debate at Oxford in the 1290s'. (He was no more than a child then.) As it happens, Trevet's rather casual remark that `the acts of man's free will are carried out through his soul, being a secondary cause' has not much in common with Bradwardine's major thesis of the coefficient of God with man.¹¹ Donaghey's other remarks do not inspire confidence either: rather than setting free will above the intellect, Trevet argued, as we will see below, for a primacy of the intellect in his commentary on Book V prose 2. And while Trevet's unusual employment of the Old-English version of King Alfred is interpreted by Donaghey as an Aristotelian counter-move against a predominantly Platonic reading of Boethius by William of Conches, he also suggests that in his commentary Trevet has `many echoes of traditional Augustinianism'.¹²

Trevet, then, is often misinterpreted by scholars concentrating on the commentary as a source for vernacular translations and literary works, without taking into account the academic context of his work. On the other hand, in the few accounts of Trevet's contribution to the scholastic debates of his time, there has understandably been no discussion of anything other than his university disputations, set out in his *Quodlibets* and *Quaestiones ordinariae*, composed in the first two decades of the fourteenth century. From these studies, we learn something about Trevet's role in these scholastic debates, but there has

¹⁰ Ibidem, 25. On the intermediaries used by Fate (Bk IV pr. 6, lines 44ff.) Trevet only comments: A(...) per ipsam [= animam humanam] tamquam per causam secundariam exercentur actus liberi arbitrii qui sub Providentia cadunt≡ (Trevet, *super Boecio*, ed. Silk, 613). On Trevet's views on the relationship between God and man, see the *quodlibet* edited by M. Schmaus, `Nicolai Trivet, Quaestiones de causalitate scientiae Dei et concursu divino', *Divus Thomas* 35 (1932), 185-196 (incl. an edition of *quodlibet* XI qu. 1 and qu. 5).

¹¹ See G. Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians*, Cambridge 1957 (Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, Series 2, 5), 93-97; H. A. Oberman, *Archbishop Thomas Bradwardine: A Fourteenth-Century Augustinian*, Utrecht 1958, 77-94; Edith Wilks Dolnikowski, *Thomas Bradwardine. A View of Time and a Vision of Eternity in Fourteenth-Century Thought*, Leiden 1995, (Studies in the History of Christian Thought, 65), 165-207 (from the perspective of Bradwardine's views on time and eternity).

¹² Donaghey, `Nicholas Trevet's Use', 27.

been no attempt to use this information to cast a light on the scholastic context of Trevet's literary output, despite Ehrle's statement that '[z]ur Beurteilung der Geistesrichtung Trivets dürfen wir unsern Blick nicht auf dessen Quolibet und seinen Sentenzenkommentar bannen' and that of Hauke that 'man nicht nur von seinen Quodlibeta ausgehen [darf]'.¹³

There has been one notable exception to this unfortunate division of labour between medievalists. In a recent study Mary Louise Lord has confirmed Trevet's authorship of a commentary on Virgil's *Eclogues* by pointing out parallels between this text, the Boethius commentary and Trevet's *quodlibet* 11 qu. 19 on the harmony of the spheres.¹⁴ Her valuable study further gives the lie to the view that Trevet was hostile to Platonic notions. In fact, on the issue of the harmony of the spheres he sided with 'the Platonists' and the Pythagoreans against Aristotle (who had denied harmony in the spheres and had excluded the possibility that heavenly bodies make any sound) and Thomas Aquinas. This does not deter him, however, from drawing on Aristotle's works and Thomas's commentaries thereon in the course of the arguments pro and contra.

In developing her argument for Trevet's authorship of the Virgil commentary, Lord also discusses the prologues to other commentaries by Trevet, and explores his attitude towards classical mythology and the employment of allegory, comparing his use of the term *integumentum* (in the Boethius commentary) with the use of the term *allegoria* (in the Virgil commentary).¹⁵ Trevet's place in the traditions of literary

¹³ Ehrle, 'Nikolaus Trivet', 29; Hermann Hauke, *Die Lehre von der Beseligenden Schau nach Nikolaus Trivet*, München 1967, 62.

¹⁴ Mary Louise Lord, 'Virgil's *Eclogues*, Nicholas Trevet, and the Harmony of the Spheres', 186-273 (with the text of the *quaestio* on pp. 267-273). Cf. also Jean Prim, 'L'harmonie du monde chez Nicolas Trevet (XIV^e siècle)', *Annuaire, Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes*, (1966-7), 299-307. The case for Trevet's authorship had already been made by the editors A. Augusto Nascimento and J.M. Díaz de Bustamante, *Nicolás Trivet Anglico, Commentario a las Bucólicas de Virgilio: Estudio y edición crítica*, Santiago de Compostela 1984, 13-18, but Lord's comparisons of passages from the three works dispel all possible doubt (if there was any doubt at all, for in a Naples MS, the commentary is explicitly attributed to Trevet; only at the end of her article does Lord give this piece of evidence, see p. 258).

¹⁵ This should make one careful in using an argument based on the employment of terms such as *integumentum*, *allegoria*, *involucrum*, *fabula* and so forth, as evidence for or against authenticity: one and the same author may use exclusively term x in work A and term y in work B, dependent (inter alia) on the text glossed. Arguments of this kind have been used, for example, in the debate on the works of (pseudo-)Bernard Silvestris (by J. W. Jones, Jr., 'The So-Called Silvestris Commentary on the *Aeneid* and Two Other Interpretations', *Speculum* 64 [1989], 835-848).

criticism is thus well secured, traditions to which he himself greatly contributed by composing commentaries on works no medieval scholar had tackled before: Seneca's Tragedies, the elder Seneca's *Declamationes*, Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita*, and Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*.

Although Lord's use of Trevet's *quodlibets* is understandably restricted to the one question that is relevant to her theme, it has become clear that by crossing the boundaries of the several genres in which Trevet as polymath was active, light can be thrown on the way learning could be pressed into service in different contexts. Trevet would probably have applauded the reading of his literary work against the background of his scholastic output and vice versa, since he himself referred to his Boethius commentary in his *quodlibets*, and cross-references can be found in his other works too.¹⁶

I shall therefore try to bridge the two separate treatments that Trevet has received so far from literary historians on the one hand and historians of scholastic philosophy and theology on the other. What will emerge from this, I hope, is a more adequate picture of a specifically late thirteenth-century/early fourteenth-century context of Trevet's reading of Boethius' *Consolatio*. While not suggesting that this is the only fruitful way of looking at Trevet's commentary, I do think that this is a necessary, complementary approach if we are to give Trevet the credit that medieval scholars were not slow to bestow on him but which a number of modern scholars have refused to give him or have given him for ill-informed reasons.

II

Trevet received his training from the Dominicans at Oxford at the end of the thirteenth century.¹⁷ As bachelor he participated in the disputations of about 1300-1302 and probably incepted in 1303. His *quodlibets*

¹⁶ Ehrle, 'Nikolaus Trivet, 25 n. 2 and n. 3; Hauke, *Die Lehre*, 123⁺; Lord, 'Virgil's *Ecloques*, Nicholas Trevet', 192. Cf. *infra* n. 59.

¹⁷ On Trevet's life and works see esp. F. Ehrle, 'Nikolaus Trivet, seine Leben, seine Quolibet und Quaestiones ordinariae', *Abhandlungen zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters. Festgabe Clemens Baeumker*, Münster i.W. 1923 (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters: Texte und Untersuchungen, Suppl. Bd., 2), 1-63; A. G. Little and F. Pelster, *Oxford Theology and Theologians (1282-1302)*, Oxford 1934, 283-285; A. B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500*, vol. 3, Oxford 1957-59, pp. 1902-1903 (with further bibliography); R. J. Dean, 'Cultural Relations in the Middle Ages: Nicholas Trevet and Nicholas of Prato', *Studies in Philology* 45 (1948), 541-564; cf. *ibidem*, 'The Dedication of Nicholas Trevet's Commentary on Boethius', *Studies in Philology* 63 (1966), 593-603.

I-V date from 1303 to 1307/8, after which he went to Paris to continue his studies. He returned to Oxford in 1314 and became regent master again. He taught at Oxford and London for the rest of his life with possible visits to Paris and Italy. He maintained good connections with the royal household, high-placed churchmen, and his Dominican superiors, and through these connections Trevet acquired a wide reputation as a biblical and classical scholar, who was commissioned by no less than Pope John XXII to compose a commentary on Livy, and by Cardinal Nicholas of Prato to write an exposition of the *Tragedies* of Seneca.¹⁸ His biblical commentaries were approved by the General Chapter of his Order, and his Boethius commentary too was written by request.¹⁹ He also wrote commentaries on the *Declamationes* of the Elder Seneca, on Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, on Virgil and possibly on Juvenal and Cicero, and from 1320 he was engaged in the writing of histories.

It is therefore important to bear in mind that Trevet's active involvement in scholastic university disputations during the first two decades of the fourteenth century was only one aspect of his successful academic career. Trevet's interests covered a much larger field than those of the average scholastic academic, and indeed do not reveal a speculative cast of mind, and although he played a part in the scholastic disputations, he became known more for his scholarly study of the Bible and profane literature than for his contributions to scholastic thought.²⁰

By the time Trevet entered the Order of the Dominicans, much of the energy of the black friars had been concentrated on defending Thomistic thought against the sometimes severe criticisms from English Franciscans, such as John Pecham, Roger Marston and William de la Mare, and Paris masters, most notably Henry of Ghent, whose Augustinian views were often in opposition to those of Thomas

¹⁸ On the relationship between Nicholas of Prato and Trevet see Dean, 'Cultural Relations'.

¹⁹ On the dedication of Trevet's commentary to a Paul in Pisa, see Dean, 'The Dedication of Nicholas Trevet's Commentary', and the discussion by Donaghey, 'Nicholas Trevet's Use', 3-11.

²⁰ J. I. Catto, 'Theology and Theologians 1220-1320', *The Early Oxford Schools*, ed. J. I. Catto, Oxford 1984 (History of the Universities of Oxford, 1), 513-517. Cf. the introduction to *Thomas von Sutton. Contra Quodlibet Iohannis Duns Scoti*, ed. Johannes Schneider, München 1978 (Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für die Herausgabe ungedruckter Texte aus der mittelalterlichen Geisteswelt, 7), 19 on Trevet: A seine geringe Neigung zur Kontroverse und überhaupt zu spekulativen Fragen der Art, wie sie in *Contra Quodlibet*. [possibly by Sutton] behandelt werden.

Aquinas. Whatever the precise impact of the condemnations at Paris in 1277 and at Oxford in 1286, it seems clear that the early Thomist school had a hard time, faced as it was with an intellectual culture of seemingly predominant Franciscan stamp. In the closing decades of the thirteenth century, however, Thomistic positions began to be defended by the Dominicans with renewed force, partly as response to William de la Mare's *Correctorium*. Such Dominican friars as Richard Knapwell, Robert Oxford, Thomas Sutton and William Macclesfield strongly supported typically Thomistic tenets of the late thirteenth century such as the unicity of substantial form in man, the real distinction of essence and existence, matter (being determined by quantity) as the principle of individuation, the superiority of the intellect to the will, the dependence of human knowledge on sensitive cognition, and the pure potentiality of primary matter.²¹

Presumably a pupil of Thomas Sutton, Trevet belonged to this group of defenders of Thomistic thought. The situation that Trevet encountered at the end of the thirteenth century was certainly not as tense for the Dominicans as in the 1280s; much ground had been regained. However, from some remarks in his *Quodlibets* it is clear that the impact of the condemnations at Paris and Oxford was still being felt at about 1300, that is at the time Trevet was composing his commentary. Possibly referring to Archbishop Pecham, he writes (ironically?) that although he wishes to follow the *principia Phylosophi et doctrinam eius et multorum catholicorum* in denying the plurality of substantial forms, he will say that a plurality of forms is a possible position to maintain according to the *sententia* of the archbishop, and he will not attempt to solve the difficulties inherent in this position, since the archbishop himself had not thought it wise to do so.²² And later, in 1314, when the condemnations must surely have lost their impact, Trevet nevertheless writes that he will 'out of reverence for the archbishop [that is, his condemnations] only point out the difficulties (*glossari*)' of a particular

²¹ Cf. William J. Courtenay, *Schools and Scholars in Fourteenth-Century England*, Princeton, New Jersey, 1987, esp. 175-182 (with further bibliography), and F. Ehrle, 'Thomas de Sutton, sein Leben, seine Quolibet und seine *Quaestiones disputatae*', *Festschrift Georg von Hertling*, Kempten and München 1913, 426-450, on 437; P. Glorieux, 'Comment les thèses thomistes furent proscrites à Oxford', *Revue thomiste* 33 (1927), 259-291; D. A. Callus, *The Condemnation of St. Thomas at Oxford*, Oxford 1946; E. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, New York 1955, 410-427.

²² Ehrle, 'Nikolaus Trivet', 32 n. 1: A(...) sed quia modum illum in sententia sua non expressit, nec ego exprimo, ne forte ab intentione sua deficiam.≡ Cf. J. I. Catto, 'Theology and Theologians 1220-1320', 503: 'It is quite clear that in spite of Pecham's visitation in 1284 to maintain Kilwardby's ban on the unity thesis, it continued to be disputed in the schools (...)≡.

condemned article.²³

It is against this background of a reasoned defense of Thomist positions that we must place Trevet's most philosophical passages from his Boethius commentary. These passages were not mere digressions but concerned two crucial themes which constituted Boethius' own philosophical position: human cognition and free will.

III

The soul and human cognition

My first example is Trevet's response to Boethius' Platonic account of human cognition. Trevet's interpretation cannot be understood without considering the scholastic debates on the cognitive process which were waged in the universities at the end of the thirteenth century. This is not the place to give a detailed account, and the following outline must suffice to convey only a very rough idea of the issues at stake.²⁴ In question 25 of his *quodlibet* II, Trevet himself introduces the problem as follows.²⁵ The two extreme positions on the soul that could be entertained were exemplified by, on the one hand, the Stoic doctrine of the soul as an entirely passive *tabula rasa*, a blank board of wax on which external objects could impress their images (but then there would be no difference between sensible and intellectual cognition—*quod non*), and on the other hand the position of the soul as an entirely active entity that works on its object of knowledge as fire on combustible matter (but then the object of knowledge, under the influence of the knowing

²³ Ehrle, 'Nikolaus Trivet', 43-44 n. 4.

²⁴ For the general background see A. Hufnagel, *Studien zur Entwicklung des thomistischen Erkenntnisbegriffes im Anschluß an das Correctorium 'Quare'*, Münster 1935 (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters, 31/4); P. Glorieux, *Les premières polémiques thomistes*, vol. 1, *Le Correctorium Corruptorii 'Quare'*, Kain (Belgium) 1927; Courtenay, *Schools and Scholars*, 178-182; Katherine H. Tachau, *Vision and Certitude in the Age of Ockham. Optics, Epistemology and the Foundations of Semantics 1250-1345*, Leiden 1988 (Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters, 22), 27-81; Z. Kuksewicz, 'Criticisms of Aristotelian Psychology and the Augustinian-Aristotelian Synthesis', *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. N. Kretzmann, A. Kenny, J. Pinborg, Cambridge 1982, 623-628, and in the same volume, Edward P. Mahoney, 'Sense, Intellect, and Imagination in Albert, Thomas, and Siger', 602-622.

²⁵ Edition in Hauke, *Die Lehre*, p. 117^{ff}. Hauke's edition is based on two MSS: Basel, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. B.IV.4, and Worcester, Cathedral Library, Cod. F 3.

subject, would be changing all the time—*quod non*). Both positions must be refuted.

Aristotle therefore viewed the process of human cognition, Trevet writes, as a mixture of active and passive moments. In short, for him the act of understanding is something passive in so far as the soul has the potentiality to get to know something (that is, to be perfected), and it is something active in so far as it brings the potentiality of knowing something to the state of actual knowledge. It was thus claimed that understanding is a passive process in which the soul receives abstract concepts. The process starts with the sense data which are turned into sensible images, and these must be transformed into intelligible forms which can then be presented to the passive intellect. This transformation by which the universal content is abstracted from the sensible images, cannot be carried out by external things, for as Trevet writes in his *quodlibet* question, referring both to Augustine and Aristotle, only something active itself can bring something from potency into act. Aristotle, therefore, credited an active power of the soul with this transformation, that is the *intellectus agens*.²⁶ The precise functions of the active and passive powers and their relationship remained vague in Aristotle's work. At times, it seems that the active intellect was conceived of as something that could exist apart from the body and survive death, a suggestion which in the hands of the Averroistic-Aristotelian thinkers proved to be extremely controversial.

As is well-known, medieval schoolmen fiercely debated these questions, occasioned not only by Aristotle's text and the commentaries thereon by Avicenna, Averroes and others, but also by the Platonic-Augustinian conception of the soul as being an image of God, a spiritual substance that was endowed with innate knowledge and illuminated by God. Many schoolmen aimed at a reconciliation of these and other traditions. Those more inclined to follow the Augustinian line, stressed the active part of the soul and its autonomy and independence from sense data and phantasms (to use the scholastic term for the forms of sensible cognition). The passive character of the potential intellect was often toned down, or indeed supplied with a much more active role. Thomas Aquinas and his followers, on the other hand, emphasized the

²⁶ AUnde Aristoteles videns actum intelligendi esse perfectionem intelligit, quod autem perficitur aliquo actu, prius erat potentia perfectibile. Nihil autem reducitur de potentia ad actum nisi per aliquod activum. Nullum autem corpus potest proportionale activum respectu intellectus, ut probat Augustinus in Super Genesim, lib. 12 et cap.^o `mirifice', et Aristoteles (in) III De Anima per unam et eandem rationem, quod `semper agens est nobilius patiente'. Ideo posuit ipse (Aristoteles) ipsam naturam intellectus distingui in duo, quorum unum esset activum, quo esset omnia facere, et aliud materiale passivum, quo esset omnia fieri≡ (ed. Hauke, *Die Lehre*, p. 118*).

basis of intellectual cognition in sense data and its dependence on phantasms. In Thomas' psychology, for example, there is hardly any place for divine illumination or for an active role of the potential intellect—man must count on his *lumen naturale*. Neither is there any place for the suggestion, often made by more Augustinian thinkers and by Albertus Magnus, that the human intellect can achieve intuitive cognition of God or other separated substances in this life. They can be known only by comparison with things of which the human intellect has phantasms.

Thus, much of the debate, which of course is far more complicated and varied than indicated here, centred on the question as to what extent the soul is dependent on the body or, in other words, whether the soul's lofty status, being an image of God, is jeopardized if it is connected to the body and dependent on it for its knowledge. The condemnation by Bishop Tempier in 1277 was designed to put an end to Aristotelian-Averroistic interpretations of human cognition, and one of the targets was Aquinas' teaching.²⁷ What was in fact condemned was a close connection of the immaterial soul and the material body, and more specifically the potential or passive nature of the intellect, dependent on sensible phantasms. Defenders of Thomas Aquinas had a hard time.²⁸

It is therefore of special interest to see Trevet, in the wake of these debates, commenting on a text in which a Platonic account of the soul and human cognition is presented.²⁹ In Boethius' *Consolatio*, the soul is credited with an active role in the process of human cognition, and hence this text could be appropriated with perhaps more justice by scholars thinking along Platonic-Augustinian lines than by Thomists such as Trevet. Boethius' account may be summarized as follows. Man's fallen state is shown in his dependence on a bodily existence and bodily sensations. Upon embodiment the soul forgets the perfect knowledge it enjoyed in heaven where it could gaze at the Platonic forms. But although tainted by the 'bulky oblivion' (*obliuiosam molem*) being an effect of its embodiment, the soul has retained some 'seeds of truth' (*semen ueri*; III metre 11). If the soul knows something in its embodied

²⁷ See R. Hissette, *Enquête sur les 219 articles condamnés à Paris le 7 mars 1277*, Louvain and Paris 1977 (Philosophes Médiévaux, 22), 218ff.

²⁸ Courtenay, *Schools and Scholars*, 178-182; Kuksewicz, 'Criticisms', 623.

²⁹ On Boethius' account, see V. Schmidt-Kohl, *Die neuplatonische Seelenlehre in der Consolatio Philosophiae des Boethius*, Meisenheim 1965. For medieval interpretations, see my 'The Preexistence of the Soul in Medieval Thought', *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale* 63 (1996), 93-135.

life on earth, this is therefore due to the knowledge it had in its previous life in heaven. Thus, for Boethius, following the Platonic tradition, knowledge is a recollection of things seen by the soul in a previous life (III metre 11; V metre 3).

As a preparatory step in the course of his main thesis on the reconciliation of free will and divine foreknowledge, Boethius argues in Book V metre 4 that the mode of knowing an object is dependent on the knowing subject rather than on the object of knowledge, and he does so by way of a criticism of the Stoic doctrine of the soul as a *tabula rasa*. The stirring of the 'seeds of truth' through 'learning and doctrine' may be occasioned by external stimuli, but it is the soul, according to Boethius, that orders, compares, combines and analyses the impressions, and comes to knowledge by dint of its own power: 'This is an efficient cause (*efficiens causa*) more powerful by far than that which passively receives only the impressed marks on things material' (V metre 4, lines 26-29).

What Trevet in his commentary on this passage accomplishes is a notable piece of hermeneutic manoeuvre. On the one hand, he wants to tone down the active role which is credited to the soul in the *Consolatio*, committed as he is to a Thomist interpretation of the cognitive process, on the other hand he must furnish the text with an interpretation that does justice to the *littera* as well as the *sententia*. He starts by raising five objections to the theory of the Stoics, amounting to the point that if the soul comes to knowledge only on the basis of impressions from external objects, no negative/affirmative propositions or syllogisms could be formed, nor could knowledge be formed of non-corporal things. The category of corporal, sensible objects is simply much too narrow for explaining processes in thought and reasoning.³⁰

When he comes to comment on the active role which Boethius attributed to the soul, Trevet writes that some have taken Boethius as arguing here for an active role of the possible intellect, in view of the fact that he calls the mind a *causa efficiens* and refers to such operations

³⁰ Alimprobat autem predictam opinionem redeundo ad quinque inconuenientia quorum primum est quia si cognitio intellectiua perficeretur per solam impressionem factam a corporibus tunc in anima non esset uis per quam cognosceret omnia (...). Secundum inconueniens est quia hoc supposito non posset singillatim cognoscere unam partem diffinitionis sine alia ut puta animalitatem sine racionalitate (...). Tercium inconueniens est quod si mens omnino nichil facit nisi patitur impressionem a corpore, tunc non esset dare aliquam uim per quam unum cognitum diuideretur ab alio formando de eis propositionem negatiuam; quod falsum est (...). Quintum inconueniens est quia secundum hanc opinionem non erit dare uiam per quam anima a principiis ad conclusiones procedit sillogizando et per uerum conclusum redarguet falsum prius apprehensum (Trevet, *super Boecio*, ed. Silk, 747-749).

as dividing, combining and syllogizing. He does not mention any names, but it is quite clear that he must have had in mind Henry of Ghent who had distinguished two aspects of the possible intellect: one being entirely passive, the other active. Although Henry does not cite Boethius here, his words strongly recall the argument of the *Consolatio*.³¹ According to Trevet, however, Boethius's intention was not to speak about the possible intellect, but about the mind in general.³² Of course, one could criticise Boethius for his loose terminology, and for having adduced the wrong arguments in order to argue for the soul's active character, since a) the cognitive process owes more to the *potentia passiva* than to the *potentia activa*, and b) these mental operations, although they have an active ring to them, are *passiones* and belong to the sphere of the possible intellect.³³ In order to free Boethius from these accusations, Trevet first explains the basic tenets of Aristotelian teaching on understanding, summarized above.³⁴

³¹ Henry of Ghent, *Quodl.* XIV qu. 6: ADico quod duplex est actio intellectus possibilis. Vna qua intelligit prima intelligentia et simplicia, ad quam determinatur per obiectum. Alia uero est eius actio secunda qua se exercet et discurrit ab uno in alterum diuidendo, congruendo et conferendo... Similiter dico quod esse quidditatum habet esse ab intellectu diuidendo et congregando. Cum enim intellectus operatus fuerit uniuersale, quod est primum in ipsa cognitione confusa, intellectus primo concipit in eo genus supremum sub ratione maxime confusi (= *Quodlibeta Magistri Goethals a Gandavo doctoris Sollenis...*, Paris 1518, reprint Louvain 1961, fol. 566; quoted in Hauke, *Die Lehre*, 137-138 notes 15 and 16). On Henry, see Tachau, *Vision and Certitude*, 28-39 (with further bibliography), and Kuksewicz, 'Criticisms of Aristotelian Psychology', 625-626.

³² AEx hiis que hic dicuntur arguunt quidam quod intellectus possibilis anime in intelligendo sit actiuus, et hoc dicunt esse de intencione Boecii in metro isto. Sed tamen hoc non uidetur uerum, quia si consideramus uerba Boecii, manifestum est quod nichil loquitur de intellectu possibili sed tantum de mente (= Trevet, *super Boecio*, ed. Silk, 751; interpunction slightly altered).

³³ AEt non est dubium quin mens non contineat tam intellectum agentem quam possibilem quin sit immo causa effectiua intellectus ratione intellectus agentis. Sed forte uidebitur alicui et racionabiliter quod non sufficiat ista ratio ponderatis racionibus hic positus et racione quam fecit hic Boecius. Cum enim mens contineat tam potenciam actiuam quam passiuam respectu intellectionis et magis compleatur intellectio per potenciam passiuam quam actiuam non deberet [i.e. Boethius] simpliciter dicere quod mens simpliciter esset causa efficiens et magis quam causa materialis in intelligendo nisi ita esset quod intellectus possibilis saltem in complemento intellectionis esset actiua (...) (= *super Boecio*, ed. Silk, 751-753).

³⁴ AEt ideo ponit Aristotiles tale effectiuum a parte anime quod uocat [uocat Silk] intellectum agentem, cuius officium est fantasmata, que sunt potencia intellectiua facere actu intelligibilia ita quod ab eis uirtute intellectus agentis imprimatur intellectui possibili illud per quod in actu intelligendi reducitur (= ed. Silk, 754).

With this essentially Aristotelian-Thomistic account, Trevet now can save the *littera* of Boethius' text. Boethius' intention was simply to refute the claims of the Stoics, not to claim an active role for the potential intellect. Indeed, Boethius only spoke about the mind in general. And concerning such mental activities mentioned by Boethius as syllogizing and analyzing, one could argue that Boethius simply meant to say that they are intellectual activities of the mind without attributing them to any particular power of the soul.³⁵ In that case, one may agree with him that they have an active aspect to them, for these activities require the light of the agent intellect in order to apprehend anything.

The *sententia Platonica* concerning the soul—tainted as it is by oblivion as an effect of its embodiment, but still in possession of innate knowledge of the 'seeds of truth' (that is, the basic principles)—, can thus be given a sane reading (*ad sanum intellectum*). The Platonic innate knowledge of first principles must be interpreted as the capacity of the passive soul to receive the intelligible forms with the aid of the agent intellect. However, the cognitive process cannot start out of itself and needs the phantasms from the sensitive cognition. That is the meaning of the Platonic expression 'the sleeping soul' in the body and Boethius' words that 'the mind's wakened power, calling upon these forms it holds within to similar motions, applies them to the marks received from without and joins those images to the forms hidden within' (lines 35-40). 'Having seen these things', Trevet concludes, 'the literal sense is clear (*Hiis uisis plana est littera*)'.³⁶

³⁵ A(...) dicendum quod non est intencio Boecii negare quin mens sit passua racione intellectus possibilis sed uult quod mens magis sit effectiua in intellectione quam sit passua ab ipsis corporibus extra (...), quod erat ut ex predictis patet de intencione Stoicorum quam principaliter intendit improbare (...). Ad tercium dicendum quod Boecius non intendit concludere efficientiam a parte mentis per hoc quod huius operacionis sint acciones quedam proprie dicte sed per hoc quod siue sint acciones siue passiones, tamen dubium non est quin sint operationes intellectuales. Unde, cum omnis operacio sequatur aliquam formam, necesse est principium istarum operacionum esse formam actu intelligibilem, sed res extra non possunt facere aliquid actu intelligibile quia forme rerum extra habent esse in materia et ideo non sunt actu intelligibiles sed in potencia tantum et tale non potest efficere intelligibile in actu (...). Vel potest dici quod non loquitur hic Boecius de istis operacionibus secundum quod precise spectant ad intellectum possibilem sed secundum quod tocus mentis sunt que intellectum agentem et possibilem continet (ed. Silk, 754-756).

³⁶ A Et hoc quidem ad sanum intellectum trahi potest sic ut intelligamus species rerum naturaliter inditas anime in quantum omnes species ad quas intellectus possibilis est in potencia uirtute continentur in intellectu agente. Sed quia tale esse speciei non sufficit ad hoc quod anima actu intelligit, ideo dicitur *sopita* esse. Et quia per mutacionem sensus causatur fantasma per quod determinatur lumen intellectus agentis ad abstrahendum determinatam speciem intelligibilem, ideo dicitur quod precedit intellectum aliqua passio

Trevet has now provided a modernized reading of Boethius' Platonic account of human cognition, but at the cost of neglecting the heterodox doctrine of the preexistence of the soul, which unmistakably informs Boethius' refutation of the Stoic doctrine, and generally the entire account of man's cognitive process in the *Consolatio*. In his commentary on III metre 11 Trevet cannot avoid Boethius' clear allusions to the soul's preexistence. His solution is to draw on Thomas Aquinas' teaching on the separated soul *after* this life in order to elucidate what the soul would look like if it, *per impossibile*, could exist *before* this earthly existence. Trevet explains that Boethius' words do not refer to a preexistent life of the soul (which would be a heretical position to defend), but `is used here in as much as, if the soul existed by itself [separately from the body] it would have in its memory, albeit in a confused state, that which it learns [here in his life].³⁷ The soul has a certain perfection when united to the body, because without bodily sensation it cannot gain any knowledge. But when separated from the body, the soul has *also* a certain perfection because in this case it does not suffer any hindrance from the body and `therefore its power is more unified.' Despite this latter sort of perfection, the mode of knowing in the disembodied state is said to be *confusa*, for in this condition the soul cannot know things individually (since it lacks the body's sensory experience of things) but only universally.

This rather incoherent position is basically that of Thomas Aquinas. On the one hand, the soul without body is said to be *imperfectior* and *praeter naturam*, because it can only reach its perfection *in unione ad corpus*; on the other hand, the body is an *impedimentum* and hinders the soul in its search for full knowledge.³⁸ About the mode of knowing of

uel immutatio sensus per quam intellectus excitetur. Et quia abstracta specie intelligibile non fit intellectio nisi per conuersionem ad fantasma, ideo dicit quod speciem intellectus reconditam, que est species intelligibilis abstracta, applicat uoci exteriori uel imagini per quam intelligitur fantasma. Hiis uisis plana est littera (ed. Silk, 758-759).

³⁷ Transl. by A. B. Scott in *Chaucer's 'Boece'*, ed. Minnis, 81. Latin text from the edition of Silk in *ibidem*, 55 (= Trevet, *super Boecio*, ed. Silk, 477): *Asimiliter quod dicit recordatur impropria locutio est sed accipit recordacionem non pro recuperacione alicuius obliti quod prius erat scitum sed pro recuperacione illius quod sciret anima separata a corpore licet confuso modo, quod tamen nescit corpori coniuncta.* For a discussion of this passage, see Minnis and Nauta, *'More Platonic loquitur'*, 15-18 and Nauta, *'The Preexistence of the Soul'*, 129-132 (focusing on what I called in that article the *'post-existence'* of the soul as an orthodox state in order to elucidate the heterodox, hypothetical state of its *'preexistence'*).

³⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I-I, qu. 89, especially art. 1, and *Quaestiones de Anima*, qu. 17 and 18, ed. J. H. Robb, Toronto 1968, 227-244. Cf. J.

the disembodied soul, Thomas has hardly more to say than that the *anima separata* has another mode of being (*alius modus essendi*) and another mode of knowing (*intelligendi*) than the *anima coniuncta*.³⁹

The same approach is followed by Trevet in his commentary on Book V metre 3 where Boethius also refers to the Platonic teaching on the soul ('the soul is not totally forgetful of itself...'). Echoing Aquinas again, Trevet writes that, as the soul has a twofold being—connected to the body and separated from it—, it has a corresponding twofold way of knowing. In the embodied state, the soul must take recourse to phantasms; in the disembodied state, the soul receives forms from God by which it comes to knowledge. The disembodied state is less natural and less perfect than the embodied state, yet in another way it comes prior to it, because in this state the soul is *forma immaterialis*⁴⁰, not the *forma corporis*, and hence knowledge is not dependent on the bodily senses. Having presupposed these things, Trevet writes, one can construe the literal sense accordingly.⁴¹ At the end of this passage, Trevet must admit, however, that those who take Boethius here to treat of souls as descending into bodies and losing their knowledge on account of their embodiment, have the *littera* on their side, yet the *sententia* will be false.⁴²

Mundhenk, *Die Seele im System des Thomas Aquin. Ein Beitrag zur Klärung und Beurteilung der Grundbegriffe der thomistischen Psychologie*, Hamburg 1980, 124-7. On Platonic strands in Thomas' theory of cognition, see Josef Santeler, *Der Platonismus in der Erkenntnislehre des heiligen Thomas von Aquin*, Rauch 1939.

³⁹ Olaf Pluta, *Kritiker der Unsterblichkeitsdoktrin im Mittelalter und Renaissance*, Amsterdam 1986 (Bochumer Studien zur Philosophie, 7), 18: ABei der Frage nach der Erkenntnisweise der *anima separata* gerät Thomas von Aquino vollends in eine Aporie.≡ Mundhenk, *Die Seele*, 127 and A. Kenny, *Aquinas*, Oxford 1980, 49 come to the same conclusion. Cf. Nauta, 'The Preexistence of the Soul', 130-131.

⁴⁰ Silk has *materialis*, but this must be a mistake. MS Laon, Bibl. mun. 441, fol. 137^r has *immaterialis*.

⁴¹ A(...) ubi considerandum est quod, sicut anima habet duplex esse scilicet coniunctum et separatum, sic habet et duplicem modum cognoscendi per conuersionem ad fantasmata et acquirit determinatam cognitionem rerum colligendo eam per subministracionem sensuum ex sensilibus; separata uero cognoscit per conuersionem ad Deum, a quo influunt ei species per quas cognoscit. Sed tamen cognitio sua, quam habet separata, non est ita perfecta nec ita determinata sicut illa quam acquirit coniuncta, ut puta de ipsa et aliis animabus (...). Est eciam ulterius sciendum, quod iste modus cognoscendi sit anime minus naturalis quam modus cognoscendi in corpore, sicut et esse. Tamen iste modus aliquantulum conuenit ei per prius, quia quod conuenit alicui secundum se per prius conuenit ei quam quod conuenit ei per aliud uel ex alio sed iste modus cognoscendi quem habet separata conuenit ei secundum se ipsam in quantum est forma materialis. Sed alius modus conuenit ei in quantum est forma corporis et existens in corpore. Et hiis suppositis expone litteram sic≡ (ed. Silk, 712-713).

⁴² AQuidam uero exponentes Boecium dicunt eum locutum more quorundam Platoniorum ponencium animas creatas in celo et haberi perfectam cognitionem omnium

What Trevet's interpretation of Boethius' Platonic account of the soul and the cognitive process shows is not only his debt to Aquinas, but also a cautious attempt to provide a coherent reading that tries to do justice to the *intentio* of the author as well as to the *littera* and *sententia* of the text. By focusing on the original context of Boethius' argument, that is Boethius' criticism of the Stoic theory, Trevet seems to have a point, since Boethius' arguments for an active character of the soul as being an *efficiens causa* cannot be appropriated by advocates of an active role for the potential intellect: Boethius was merely speaking about the mind (*mens*) in general, not about any particular faculty of the soul. This does not deter Trevet from imposing his own Aristotelian-Thomistic reading on the argument in V metre 4 in terms of active and possible intellects, *species intelligibiles*, phantasms and so forth.⁴³

Trevet, however, is well aware of the hermeneutic move that is involved here: 'having seen these things, the literal sense is clear' and 'having presupposed these things, construe the literal sense as follows'—that is, he first provides a late-thirteenth century philosophical framework for a correct understanding of the deeper meaning of the text, and then construes the literal sense in line with that understanding. And when Trevet recognizes that the literal sense is sometimes hard to reconcile with Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy, as in the case of the heterodox teaching on the preexistence of the soul and its descent towards an earthly body, he still goes on at length, furnishing a *sanum intellectum* of this piece of Platonic philosophy. He is, however, honest enough to admit that according to a reading along Platonic lines the *sententia* will be false but the literal sense will be more clear.

At about the same time Trevet dealt with the whole issue of human cognition in some of his *quodlibets* questions, for example in question 25 of *quodlibet* I, 'whether the possible intellect is an active or a passive power'. Since much of the substance of the argument (down to the level of words and quotations) is the same as in Trevet's Boethius

et eam per lapsum ad corpora oblivisci sed reduci per excitacionem sensuum, quod uidetur insinuari in Menone Platonis (...). Si autem sic exponatur planior erit littera sed falsa sententia (= *super Boecio*, ed. Silk, 715). That Trevet did believe that Boethius was orthodox on the creation of the souls, is shown by his comment on V pr. 2 where Boethius once again alludes to the Platonic notion of preexistence: *Aquem [= Boethium] non est dubium Catholice de creacione animarum sensisse* (= ed. Silk, 690).

⁴³ Distinctions such as *proprie/improprie* or *large/stricte* etc. could also be used for the purpose of interpreting (often unintentionally) the author's intention in terms of one's own views: see e.g. on V pr. 5 line 1ff. (*Quodsi in corporibus sentiendis*): *AEt accipit hic 'sentire' non proprie sed large pro apprehensione intellectuali* (= ed. Silk, 761).

commentary, we need not repeat his arguments.⁴⁴

It has become clear that Trevet's commentary on Boethius' account of human cognition must be seen against the background of the late-thirteenth-century debate on human cognition. Moreover, the genres of a literary commentary and a scholastic disputation may be very distinct genres for us, but for Trevet they could both be vehicles for developing Thomist positions in a time in which a reasoned defense of Thomas' views was high on the agenda of the Oxford Dominicans. Without demolishing the Platonic foundations, he tries to readjust the *littera* to an Aristotelian-Thomistic framework, while at the same time taking Boethius' *intentio* seriously.

Free Will

My second example comes from Trevet's commentary on Book V prose 2 where Lady Philosophy discusses the problem of free will. In a long exposition Trevet draws upon the current philosophical debate, and it is to this that we must turn first, again without going into much detail.

By the time Trevet was composing his commentary, the topic of free will had already been subject to a long and vexed debate.⁴⁵ In the thirteenth century it centred especially on the relationship between the will and reason, and the localisation of free decision. One of the axioms of medieval thought was that freedom belonged to the sphere of spiritual and immaterial beings; the freer one is, the less one is linked to matter and body. God stands on top of this pyramid, with man, after the angels, in solid third position. But why should freedom be a privilege of the will, for if the will is a *rational* appetite (another widely held view), why can we not attribute freedom to (practical) reason? Thus the question how and to what extent reason influences the will in making its decisions became acute.

Two major, well-known positions are to be distinguished: the Augustinian voluntarism of Bonaventure, Henry of Ghent and many Franciscans on the one hand, and the Aristotelian rationalism of Thomas

⁴⁴ Asi diligentius eius intentio consideretur, prout alias in expositione eiusdem declaravi et nunc bene tango, et dico, quod, ut superius dictum est, Boethius intendit ibi improbare opinionem Stoicorum (...) quod improbat Boethius arguendo ex dictis operationibus, non secundum quod praecise dicuntur esse intellectus possibilis, sed secundum quod sunt totius mentis, quae intellectum agentem en possibilem inclusit (ed. Hauke, *Die Lehre*, 123^{*}).

⁴⁵ D. Odon Lottin, *Psychologie et morale aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles, i. Problèmes de Psychologie*, Gembloux 1957; J. B. Korolec, 'Free will and free choice', *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. N. Kretzmann et al., 629-641, where it is pointed out that the Latin phrase *liberum arbitrium* does not contain the Latin word for 'will' (*voluntas*), and that free will is not exactly the same as *liberum arbitrium*. I shall retain, however, the traditional phrase 'free will'.

Aquinas and many Dominicans on the other hand. Needless to say, the picture is vastly more complicated than this crude dichotomy. In general, however, one can say that the primacy of the will, its autonomy, activity and self-determination was emphasized by the first group, while the primacy of the reason and the will's dependence on external stimuli was a position that found favour in Aristotelian-Thomistic circles.⁴⁶ Thomas Aquinas, for example, said that it is the intellect that functions as the final cause of the will's act in presenting the will with its ultimate aim. Because the judgement (*arbitrium*) of reason is free, the choice of will is free, not vice versa. Later Thomas tried to mitigate the rationalist tendency in his thinking by stressing the fact that the efficient cause for moving towards a goal rests with the will: reason has become only a formal cause of acting.⁴⁷

The group of Franciscans found a supporter in Bishop Tempier of Paris who in 1277 condemned a number of propositions, for example, that the will is a merely passive power, that external forces can necessitate human action and that the will must follow the dictates of reason.⁴⁸

In the years following the condemnation, the Dominicans were on the defense. As Lottin writes, 'la scène est occupée par les seuls maîtres franciscains'.⁴⁹ But after some years, Dominicans and other masters tried to regain the ground they had lost. An important figure is the secular master, Godfrey of Fontaines, who joined battle with Henry of Ghent and Giles of Rome in the years 1289 to 1303. He defended a strong version of Aristotelian rationalism. Reason presents the will with its aim and this aim is not only the formal cause—as Thomas in his later work held—but also the efficient cause of acting.⁵⁰ He found the Franciscan

⁴⁶ For this and the following see Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, i, 226-252; 252-262; 382-389.

⁴⁷ Thomas' development can be traced from the commentary on the *Sentences* (*In II Sententiarum* dist. 24 qu. 1 art. 2, and dist. 25 qu. 1 art. 2, 4 and 5) and the *De Veritate* (qu. 24 art. 6) to the *Summa Theologiae* I-I qu. 82 art. 1 and 2.

⁴⁸ Hissette, *Enquête sur les 219 articles*, 230-263; cf. Korolec, 'Free will and free choice', 637; Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, i, 278-280.

⁴⁹ Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, i, 387.

⁵⁰ *Quodl.* 6, qu. 7 (dated 1289, see Lottin, 307 n. 4). E.g.: *AVoluntas non movet se, sed movetur ab obiecto apprehenso; quia bonum secundum quod apprehensum movet voluntatem vel ad actum volitionis ut hoc dicitur secundum rationem causae efficientis, licet secundum quod est in ipso moveat in ratione finis.* As Lottin remarks, the efficient cause comes close to the formal cause in Godfrey's thinking on this issue: the will is moved *Asecundum formam apprehensionis*. See also the other texts cited by Lottin, 310 n. 2 and 320 n. 4. On Godfrey's thought see, John F. Wippel, *The*

theory of self-determination of the will nonsense, because one always desires (and necessarily so) what reason has judged as most expedient. This does not mean that the will is not free—there are many moments of free decisions in the process of acting—but the judgement of reason is essential in getting an act done.

It is this background that we must bear in mind when reading Trevet's commentary on Book V prose 2. In the *Consolatio*, Lady Philosophy argues that there is freedom 'for there could not be any nature rational, did not that same nature possess freedom of the will. For that which can by its nature use reason, has the faculty of judgement by which it determines everything'.⁵¹ And she concludes: 'therefore those who have in themselves reason have also in them freedom to will or not to will'. From this, Trevet writes, Boethius inferred the freedom of the will because it can be brought to act in diverse ways as long as it is in accordance with the judgement of reason. Some people, he continues, think that the freedom of the will is only guaranteed when we grant it the ability to act against the judgement of reason, but that is wholly impossible, since the will never acts but on the basis of what reason has presented to her.⁵² Some try to argue in the same way for the freedom of the will by saying that the will is able not to will what the reason has judged as a proper aim. But that does not seem true. When the will has set itself an aim, and reason deliberates and gives its judgement, it is impossible that the will wills not what seems necessary for reaching that aim. We should not conclude from that, however, that the will is not free. For although once having chosen a particular aim, the will necessarily wills what is deemed necessary for reaching that aim, that aim itself is not necessarily willed by the will. It could have chosen another aim. Only when it is an ultimate aim, it seems that the will does not have much freedom to act or not to act, although in that case the necessity is not one of coercion, but one of nature; the will simply follows its natural inclination of desire.⁵³

metaphysical thought of Godfrey of Fontaines: a study in late thirteenth-century philosophy, Washington, DC, 1981.

⁵¹ translation Loeb ed., 391.

⁵² *AQuare in ipsis quibus inest ratio, inest etiam libertas volendi nolendique* [= *Consolatio* V pr. 2, line 10f.] Et nota quod hic concludit Boecius libertatem uoluntatis ex hoc, quod potest ferri in diversa secundum iudicium rationis. Unde mirum videtur, quod aliqui non possunt uidere, quod uoluntas sit libera nisi possit etiam ferri in aliquid contra iudicium rationis etiam iudicio rationis stante; quod est omnino impossibile, quia uoluntas non fertur actu in aliquid nisi quod actu ab intellectu ostenditur. Sed intellectus, cum sit unus tamen non potest ostendere aliquid uoluntati stante iudicio rationis nisi quod actu iudicat esse faciendum, quare impossibile est iudicio isto stante in aliud ferri uoluntatem (Trevet, *super Boecio*, ed. Silk, 683).

⁵³ *AQuod considerantes aliqui dicunt uoluntatem ex hoc liberam esse, quia*

This position is defended by Trevet in much the same way in his *quodlibet* V qu. 17.⁵⁴ Here the will is called a passive potency and indetermined, and can only be brought to a determinate act when moved by an object. This object is an *apprehensio* (grasping) of a certain aim and, hence, functions as the efficient cause of the act of will. The will is thus brought to an act strictly by the judgement of the (practical) intellect.⁵⁵ In order to mitigate the rationalistic ring of this argument, Trevet goes on to distinguish (as he had done in the Boethius commentary, following Boethius' own distinction in V prose 3) between absolute necessity when the will necessarily wills what the intellect has judged to be necessary for attaining an ultimate aim, and a conditional necessity when the will necessarily wills something but can refrain from doing so,⁵⁶ for example when someone must cross the Channel in order to go to Rome.⁵⁷ Because, Trevet continues, the will conditionally wills or

stante iudicio rationis potest tamen uoluntas quod iudicatum est non uelle. Sed nec uidetur uerum, quia iudicium istud est actus rationis deliberantis. Talis autem actus est imperatus a uoluntate finis impossibile est quin uelit illud quod uidetur necessarium ad finem, cum eodem actu tendat in utrumque secundum quod sic accipitur. Nec tamen ex hoc concludi potest uoluntatem non esse liberam. Licet enim stante uoluntate finis necessario uelit illud quod necessarium iudicatur ad finem, non tamen de necessitate uult finem nisi forte ille fuerit finis ultimus, respectu cuius uoluntas non habet libertatem que importat indifferentiam uolendi et nolendi, quem quidem sibi ostensum non potest uelle nec etiam non uelle (...). Sed necessitas, qua uoluntas inclinatur in ultimum finem, non est contra eius inclinationem quia hoc includeret contradiccionem, scilicet quod uoluntas uellet aliquid contra uoluntatem suam (ed. Silk, 685).

⁵⁴ Printed by Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, i, 380-382.

⁵⁵ ACum enim uoluntas, ut probatum <est>, sit potentia passiuia, indeterminata, non potest in determinatum actum nisi mota ab obiecto. Obiectum autem ad hoc quod moueat necesse est apprehensionem <esse>, que quidem apprehensio est effectiua motus uoluntatis in ipsum obiectum tamquam in finem illius (...). Motus autem uoluntatis in actu electiuo terminatur ad obiectum secundum rationem qua est acceptabilius alio, eo quod eligere nihil aliud est quam unum acceptare pre alio; (...). Et ideo dico quod uoluntas <non> potest in actum electiuum alicuius absque determinatio iudicio intellectus practici (Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, i, 380-381).

⁵⁶ AAliquis autem est <finis> quem uoluntas de necessitate uult, sicut est ultimus finis; unde si ab intellectu consiliante fuerit aliquod iudicium [*lege* iudicatum] necessarium omnibus modis ad illum finem, etiam uoluntas necessario mouetur in actu electiuo illiud quod sic iudicatum est; et si iudicetur non necessarium ad illum finem, potest illud non uelle. Alii autem sunt fines quos uoluntas non de necessitate uult, sicut ire Romam (...); sed hec est necessitas ex conditione, scilicet si uelit finem, non necessitas absoluta, potest enim dimittere uoluntatem talis finis (...) (Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, i, 381).

⁵⁷ Trevet may not have chosen this example at random, for he made a trip to Italy just around this time (see Dean, 'Cultural Relations' and Donaghey, 'Nicholas

wills not what is offered by the intellect, it is therefore rightly said that the will moves itself in so far as it relates to carrying out the act (*quoad exercitium actus respectu illiud est ad finem*), but is necessarily moved by the intellect in so far as it is aimed at a goal determined by the intellect (*quoad determinationem*). He could have taken this distinction from his Thomas Sutton, but it was basically the distinction that Thomas Aquinas had introduced, employing the terms 'quantum ad exercitium' and 'quantum ad specificationem' for the same purpose, that is to soften the rationalistic tone in his previous accounts. In this way, Trevet concludes, holy fathers and doctors have located the freedom in the will, not because it can act against the standing judgement of reason but because it can conform itself to that judgement according to what should be desired and what should be rejected.⁵⁸

Without passing any judgement on the strength or weakness of these arguments, it is interesting to notice that Trevet's opinions come close to those of other proponents of a more or less mitigated Thomist rationalism, most notably Thomas Sutton (who may have been Trevet's teacher) and Godefroid of Fontaines (who seems to leave less room than Trevet for the will to act freely). As Lottin has shown, they developed their views in opposition to those of Henry of Ghent and other Franciscan masters who had given primacy of the will over the intellect.⁵⁹ Although they did not follow Thomas Aquinas in all respects,

Trevet's Use', 3-11; they do not mention this example).

⁵⁸ In the Boethius commentary Trevet continues with a discussion, couched in typically late-thirteenth century terminology, of the localisation of the will: Alibertus uirtualiter [radicaliter *Silk*] et causaliter est in racione, propter quod ex modo cognoscendi racionis tanquam ex causa probauit liberum arbitrium esse; formaliter uero et essentialiter est in uoluntate, unde non dicimus alias potencias liberas sed tantum uoluntatem, cuius ratio est, quia agens et finis sibi proporcionantur (super *Boecio*, ed. *Silk*, 685). The corresponding passage in Trevet's *quodlibeta* is I qu. 26 (ed. Hauke, *Die Lehre*, 126⁺-128⁺, and in Lottin, *Psychologie et morale*, i, 378-379), where Trevet himself refers to his Boethius commentary: ALibertus ergo causaliter et virtualiter est in racione. Hinc est, quod Boethius, V. De Consolatione, ex ipsa racione omnem naturam rationalem tamquam per se causam demonstrat liberi arbitrii, ubi etiam alias diffusius declaratum et probatum est libertatem formaliter esse in uoluntate et causaliter in racione, et ideo ad praesens breuius pertranseo (ed. Hauke, *Die Lehre*, 128⁺; the reference to Boethius is omitted in Lottin's transcription, although he worked from the same MS as Hauke. Thus Lottin, asking himself to which *quodlibet* question Trevet is alluding here, is not aware of the fact that Trevet refers here to his Boethius commentary [379, n. 1]).

⁵⁹ *Psychologie et morale*, i, 305-339 (on Godefroid of Fontaines); 339-377 (on Thomas Sutton), and 377-389. Cf. Korolec, 'Free will and free choice', 637-638 (based on Lottin). On Sutton, see Ehrle, 'Thomas de Sutton', esp. 436-440; the introductions by Johannes Schneider to the editions of the treatise (presumably by Sutton) *Contra Quodlibet Iohannis Duns Scoti*, 1-56 and Sutton's *Quaestiones ordinariae*, München 1977 (Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für die Herausgabe ungedruckter Texte aus der mittelalterlichen Geisteswelt, 3), 1^{*}-267^{*}, esp. 164^{*}1-97^{*} (on free will) and 198^{*}-214^{*}

feeling obliged to make concessions to Tempier's condemnations, they essentially present a Thomist psychology, in stressing the Aristotelian maxim that no act can pass from potency into act out of itself: it must have not only a formal cause but also an efficient cause, and this can only be located in the object as presented by the intellect.

Trevet's explanation in his Boethius commentary, in drawing on the philosophical debates in late-thirteenth-century Oxford and Paris, is another good illustration of the academic-scholastic context of his commentary without which it becomes less intelligible and may lead to incorrect claims that Trevet gives 'primacy of the will over the intellect', and that in his commentary he has 'many echoes of traditional Augustinianism'.⁶⁰

One further example may be mentioned briefly.

In Book III prose 10 Boethius discusses the nature of God of whom it is said that he cannot have received the highest good from outside. 'But', Lady Philosophy says, 'if it is by nature that it [highest good] is in him, but it is essentially different, then since we are speaking of God the Author of all things, let him imagine who can who it was <who> joined these two different natures'.⁶¹ In his commentary on this passage, Trevet holds Boethius' argument against those who say that the attributes differ in God according to the *ratio*, independent from the intellect's activity, because in that case such a difference would render the composition of the two goods a real one:

Ex isto dicto Boecii uidetur falsa esse opinio dicendum attributa differre in Deo secundum rationem que non est per operationem [opinionem *Silk*] intellectus cuius est ratio accepta pro quiditate uel formalitate siue quocumque modo uocetur quia talis differentia compositionem realem faceret. Si quis uero dicat quod Boecius hic accipit rationem pro re utique uerum dicit eo quod ratio in re que non est per operationem intellectus de necessitate res est et distinctio talis rationis est realis. Non autem potest dici quod accipit 'diuersum ratione' pro diuersitate que est per operationem intellectus. Loquitur enim de tali diuersitate que aliquid ponit in Deo: aliter sue demonstrationes nullius momenti essent. Diuersitas

(on cognition).

⁶⁰ Donaghey, 'Nicholas Trevet's Use', 10 and 27.

⁶¹ transl. Loeb edition, 278.

autem que est ex sola operatione intellectus nichil ponit in Deo.⁶²

The question of the divine attributes was hotly debated throughout this period. Without going into any detail, I think that Trevet is referring to Duns Scotus' position. Scotus had held that all perfections in God are formally distinct in him even before any operation of the divine intellect. Such perfections as wisdom and goodness are not caused by the intellect, but exist *ex natura rei*. Scotus had used a number of expressions to refer to these formally distinct entities (for example, attributes), and Trevet clearly seems to hint at this. Scotus was severely criticized by Thomas Sutton, and Trevet's point that all distinctions that are not produced by the intellect alone are real, may have been derived from Sutton's account and held against Scotus, whose views implied the existence of a composition in God (according to Sutton's criticisms).⁶³ The passage is too brief to delineate Trevet's own position. He seems to follow Thomas (like Sutton had partly done) who had denied that the attributes are rationally distinct in God. Boethius seems to defend this. Trevet's point that the context of Boethius' discussion presupposes a kind of distinction in God between independent of the human intellect lest Boethius' demonstrations are of no account, testifies again to Trevet's sensibility to the authorial text. The tentative style of this passage suggests that Trevet had not fully worked out the question of the divine attributes. Scotus' views were just beginning to circulate in the 1290s.

Conclusion

More examples could be adduced,⁶⁴ but from the several passages that

⁶² Trevet, *super Boecio*, ed. Silk, 434-435.

⁶³ See on Sutton's position, Schneider's introduction to *Thomas von Sutton. Contra Quodlibet Iohannis Duns Scoti*, 21-56. For a critical survey of medieval views on the divine attributes, see M. J. F. M. Hoenen, *Marsilius of Inghen. Divine Knowledge in Late Medieval Thought*, Leiden 1993 (Studies in the History of Christian Thought, 50), 35-61.

⁶⁴ E.g. Trevet argues for an analogical relationship between God and his creatures, see ed. Silk, 614 and Scott's translation of the comm. on III m. 9 in *Chaucer's 'Boece'*, ed. Minnis, 64 and n. 22 (on Trevet's debt to Thomas), to be compared with Trevet's *Quodl.* 1 qu. 1, where Trevet argues that the relationship between God and his creatures is analogical, 'ens' being an analogical concept (ed. Hauke, *Die Lehre*, 7⁺-16⁺). And in his commentary on III m. 9 line 5f. (*verum insita summi forma boni*) Trevet writes about God that because he is the prime agent, He must have within himself the principle of good. And because God is the efficient cause of other things He [i.e. the efficient cause] is not a univocal cause, but an analogous or equivocal cause. In a univocal cause,

we have been looking at, it has already become clear that for Trevet his commentary on Boethius was not only an exposition of the text of the *Consolatio* but could also function as a vehicle for expounding views which found their way into his university disputations. For him the two genres of a commentary on an *auctoritas* like Boethius and a *quodlibet* question were ostensibly not so disparate in all respects that it would render mutual borrowing impossible. The *Consolatio* is frequently quoted by Trevet in his *quodlibets*, and for a more serious reason than mere literary embellishment.⁶⁵ Trevet, then, treats the *Consolatio* as a text that is relevant for the issues at stake, and although some of the expositions seem to take on the character of digressions, we have seen that his discussion is clearly motivated by and developed vis-à-vis Boethius' text. Trevet's interpretations of the Boethian account of intellectual cognition and free will have provided ample evidence for this.

We have also observed that Trevet tries to save as much as he can of the literal sense. Platonic notions generally receive careful treatment, and even in the case of the clearly heterodox view of the origin of souls, Trevet is concerned to give it a *sanum intellectum*. This hermeneutic approach is also reflected in Trevet's other works. His expositions on Seneca and Livy are straightforward, construing the text phrase by phrase, and showing no interest in the allegorical meaning.⁶⁶ And in his Psalter commentary, for example, he complains that the ancient

the perfect achievement of an effect pre-exists in the same way [i.e. both in the cause and in the effect]. In an equivocal or analogous cause it [i.e. the perfect achievement of its effect] must preexist in a more excellent way, because the principle of the good exists in God in a nobler way than in any effect. Therefore God possesses the principle of the good uniquely and in the highest degree. That is why He is called the Supreme Good [*summum bonum*]; cf. Trevet's comment on IV pr. 6, line 83ff., ed. Silk, 614). Trevet's follows Thomist teaching here (see transl. Scott in *Chaucer's 'Boece'*, ed. Minnis, 63 and n. 22).

⁶⁵ *Consolatio* V pr. 4, line 80ff. in *quodlibet* I qu. 1 (on reason, ed. Hauke, *Die Lehre*, 11⁺); V pr. 1, line 30ff. in *quodl.* I qu. 2 (on fortuitousness, pp. 18⁺-19⁺); V pr. 6 in *quodl.* I qu. 4 (on *instans durationis*, p. 28⁺, where reference is also made to Aquadam *quaestione ordinaria*); V pr. 4 line 66ff. in *quodl.* I qu. 10 (on knowledge dependent on the knowing subject, p. 64⁺); V pr. 6 line 8ff. in *quodl.* I qu. 16 (on eternity, p. 116⁺); V m. 4 in *quodl.* I qu. 25 (on Stoics, cognition etc., pp. 118⁺ff.; reference to the Boethius commentary on p. 123⁺); V pr. 2 line 10 in *quodl.* I qu. 26 (on free will, p. 128⁺); V pr. 4 line 73ff. in *quodl.* IV qu. 11 (on powers of comprehension, pp. 175⁺-176⁺).

⁶⁶ *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c. 1100-c. 1375. The Commentary Tradition*, ed. A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott with the assistance of David Wallace, Oxford 1991² (1988¹), 327 and the translations on pp. 336-360. See also Lord, 'Virgil's *Eclagues*, Nicholas Trevet', 242-255.

commentators concentrated on the profound mysteries found in allegories and, as a result, they rejected or treated perfunctorily the literal sense, in the mistaken belief that they were throwing away the rind and securing the sweet kernel', to quote Minnis' paraphrase.⁶⁷ In his commentary then Trevet's wish is to concentrate on the solid base of the letter, the literal sense being the expression of the *prima intentio* of the words of the *auctor*, while the mystical senses, which were founded on the literal sense, were the work of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁸ The other biblical commentaries too show an interest in biblical history, Hebrew and other aspects of the literal sense.

The same concern for the *prima intentio auctoris* is evident in the Boethius commentary, and enables Trevet to appropriate Boethius' ambiguous statement on the soul as an *efficiens causa* for developing his own Thomist position on the role of the passive intellect: Boethius' intention was to refute the Stoics, and only to speak about the mind in general and about intellectual powers without attributing them to any particular faculty.

Of course, the author's *prima intentio* is also a reconstruction on the part of the commentator, and often used as a cover for one's own position. But Trevet's scholarship, which ranged from biblical studies (including some Hebrew) and classical literature to astronomy and the natural sciences, has enabled him to probe into his texts with care and common sense, knowing that the author's deeper meaning or the *intentio* may not be reflected by the literal sense.⁶⁹ Thus, in his commentary on the numerical binding of the elements in III metre 9, Trevet distinguishes between three interpretations and notes that, although the first two agree more closely with the *littera* of Boethius' text, the third takes us closer to the *intentio* of the *Timaeus*, 'from which what Boethius says here was taken'.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship. Scholastic literary attitudes in the later Middle Ages*, Aldershot 1988² (1984¹), 85.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*. On Trevet's biblical scholarship see also A. Kleinhaus, 'Nicolaus Trivet, O.P., *Psalmorum interpres*', *Angelicum* 20 (1943), 219-236; B. Smalley, *Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, Oxford 1983³ (1952¹), 346-347, 351-352, and Catto, 'Theology and Theologians', 514-516.

⁶⁹ A sense of historical perspective is of course evident when Trevet is writing as historian; see for example (but many more could be given) his comment on 'fatum' (IV pr. 6, line 25ff.: *fatum a veteribus appellatum est*): *Aunde ista accepicio fati uidetur antiquior quam alia, licet alia usitacior esset temporibus Augustini et Gregorii* (ed. Silk, 607-608).

⁷⁰ Minnis and Nauta, 'More Platonic loquitur', 28, and passim for Trevet's attitude to Platonic philosophy. A different attitude may be seen in a gloss on III m. 9 line 13 (the soul's threefold nature) from a fifteenth-century Boethius commentary in MS Prague, SK □SR Roudnice VI.Fc.30: *AVnde sciendum quod ista littera communiter*

© Lodi Nauta, in *Boethius in the Middle Ages. Latin and Vernacular Traditions of the "Consolatio Philosophiae"*, eds. Maarten J. F. M. Hoenen and Lodi Nauta, Brill: Leiden 1997, 41-67

Trevet's own distinctive contribution to the explication of the deeper meaning of the *Consolatio* is, as we have seen, the use of current philosophical and theological views⁷¹, thereby adding a new chapter in the ever changing conceptions of this text. His interpretation often followed an Aristotelian-Thomist line, and was influenced by the Oxford debates in the aftermath of the condemnations by Tempier and Kilwardby witness also his *quodlibets*. Without neglecting or dismissing outright the Platonic-Augustinian tones of Boethius' text, he tried to incorporate them into a Thomist framework. Whatever modern scholars may have found in Trevet to criticize, his balanced and sustained interpretation of Boethius was much appreciated by many generations of students and readers to come, and became the cornerstone of the Boethian tradition in the later medieval and early modern period.

exponitur ad intentionem Platonis in Tymeo. Sed quia illa expositio est difficillima et modicae utilitatis, ideo eam transeo. Componatur igitur facilior[em] ad intentionem Aristotelis (...)≡ quoted by E. Jeauneau, 'Plato apud Bohemos', *Mediaeval Studies* 41 (1979), 161-214, on 189.

⁷¹ We may add that Trevet makes use of Ptolemaic-Aristotelian astronomy to elucidate Boethius' references to the planets and heavenly phenomena. He cites, among others, Ptolemy's *Almagest* (ed. Silk, 273 and 276), the twelfth-century astronomical compendium deriving from al-Farghānī (275), and Grosseteste's *De sphaera* (278).