



TEXT AND COMMENTARY: THE ROLE OF TRANSLATIONS IN THE LATIN TRADITION OF ARISTOTLE'S *DE ANIMA* (1120–1270)

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Introduction

Few things more beautiful and more pathetic are recorded in history than this Arab physician's dedication to the thoughts of a man separated from him by fourteen centuries; to the intrinsic difficulties we should add that Averroes, ignorant of Syriac and of Greek, was working with the translation of a translation. The night before, two doubtful words had halted him at the beginning of the Poetics. These words were tragedy and comedy. He had encountered them years before in the third book of the Rhetoric; no one in the whole world of Islam could conjecture what they meant. [...] Something had revealed to him the meaning of the two obscure words. With firm and careful calligraphy he added these lines to the manuscript: «Aristu (Aristotle) gives the name of tragedy to panegyrics and that of comedy to satires and anathemas. Admirable tragedies and comedies abound in the pages of the Koran and in the mohalacas of the sanctuary».

(Jorge Louis Borges: Averroes' Search)

In this paper we will try to detect the interaction between text and commentary in the Latin tradition of Aristotle's *De anima*. Far from being a mechanical transposition, the work of the medieval translators was an interpretation which was shaped by the Ancient commentaries and which, in turn, influenced the commentaries of the medieval thinkers. Therefore our investigation is concerned with two major questions: how did the medieval translators make use of Ancient commentaries on Aristotle, and how did the translation influence the medieval commentaries?



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For the *verbum e verbo* technique¹ of the medieval translators, the basic semantic unit of a text is the single, unbound lexeme, that is, the word. Therefore the main issue medieval translators were concerned with was terminology—the specific words—used to explicate certain themes. The lexical tools with which medieval and modern European philosophers operated for centuries were improved in this way by the translators, who struggled to hand over to Western Europe the cultural inheritance of the Ancient and Classical Greeks. Our analysis will therefore focus on this lexical level of certain philosophical texts.

The study of philosophical translations, situated on the borderline between philosophy and philology, implies an interdisciplinary approach. My article, as a methodological experiment, is built on a comparative textual analysis of the different versions of the same text and the related commentaries. The core of the examination consists of comparison in two main, and entirely opposite directions: detecting the influence of the Ancient commentaries on Moerbeke's translation of *De anima*, and detecting the influence of Moerbeke's translation on medieval commentaries. This comparison involves several strata of texts: one needs first to compare the Greek original with the Latin translation, the Moerbeke translations with other Latin or vernacular, Ancient, medieval or

¹ The origins of the word for word method can be traced back at least to the first biblical translations: this was the text the authority of which allowed not even a change in the word order. In the case of the Aristotle translations of the Middle Ages, there was a double authority which tied the hands of the translators: the respect for the one who was called the Philosopher, and the prestige of the Greek language. However, there was much more in the promotion of this technique than respect for authorities. Such a technique was supported by a philosophy of language that stated that "language is there only to give external expression through a system of conventional signs to the thoughts or concepts which the mind conceives within itself, and which refer to external realities." See James McEvoy, "Language, Tongue and Thought in the Writings of Robert Grosseteste," in *Robert Grosseteste, exegete and philosopher* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1994). According to this theory, there was no possibility of any given language misinterpreting thoughts expressed in another language: both are just vestments, which will lead us to the reality expressed by them. As Charles Burnett expressed it, this was "the faith that the medievals had in the ability of a literal translation to preserve not only the sense of the original, but—in an almost mystical way—the very words of the original author." See C. Burnett, "Translating from Arabic into Latin in the Middle Ages: Theory, Practice and Criticism," in S. G. Lofts and P. W. Roseman, ed., *Éditer, traduire, interpréter: essais de méthodologie philosophique*, *Philosophes médiévaux* 36 (Leuven: Éditions Peeters, 1997), 72.



modern translations, in order to grasp his way of working and the importance of these translations as exactly as possible.²

Medieval Philosophical Translations: the context of the *Aristoteles Latinus*

It is a sharp and simplified, but for our purposes a useful, distinction that while the philosophy of the Renaissance was marked by Platonism, the thinking of the medieval philosophers, especially thirteenth-century scholasticism, was highly influenced by Aristotle. While from Plato there are only a few fragments translated, the Aristotelian corpus was entirely transposed into Latin and continuously retranslated over the centuries.

Because the medieval educational system was still based on the same disciplines as in Ancient Greece and Rome, the same texts had to be used, but first translated. The enormous material in the domain of philosophy required a great effort on the part of the few translators of philosophical texts. After Boethius was executed in the sixth century, the flow of Greek philosophical texts translated into Latin diminished. In contrast to this, a burst of translating activity started in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with scholars such as James of Venice, Henricus Aristippus, Burgundio of Pisa, Robert Grosseteste and William of Moerbeke. There are two major figures who rendered texts from Arabic: Gerardus of Cremona and Michael Scotus.

The list of major achievements in this field begins with Boethius and his translations of the so-called *Logica vetus*, which included Aristotle's *De interpretatione* and *Categoriae*, and Porphyry's *Isagoge*, and later, after a rediscovery of his other translations in the twelfth century, the *Prior Analytics*, *Topics* and *Sophistici elenchi*. At the beginning of the twelfth century, thanks to the activity of

² In the evaluation of medieval translators' methods, it is necessary to keep in mind Guy Guldenstop's warning: "It is necessary to formulate some appropriate criteria by means of which to evaluate Moerbeke's translation. The criteria to be applied must be searched in the expectations of Moerbeke's contemporaneous reading public. It would indeed be inequitable to condemn his work for failing to measure up to our modern humanistic or philological norms. It is evident that this translation was not based on a linguistic and historical study of a critical text edition. It is also clear that Moerbeke did not aim at emulating the rhetorical style of the author he translated." See Guy Guldenstop, "Some Critical Observations on Moerbeke's Translation of Themistius' Paraphrase of *De anima*," in Rita Beyers and Jozef Brams, eds., *Tradition et traduction: les textes philosophiques et scientifiques grecs au Moyen Âge Latin* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), 241.



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James of Venice,³ there became available in Latin the *Physics*, the *Metaphysics*, the *De anima* and parts of the *Parva Naturalia*. The thirteenth century marks a new stage in the history of the *Aristoteles Latinus*: the *Nichomachean Ethics* and several related commentaries were translated by Robert Grosseteste.⁴

The last⁵ and the most famous figure of the medieval philosophical translations was William of Moerbeke, the major character of the present study. He not only revised the existing translations, but also rendered anew several works of Aristotle, such as the *Politics* and the *Poetics*, as well as some important ancient commentaries, such as those of Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, Philoponus, Ammonius and Simplicius. Almost all the Aristotelian texts having already been translated, he revised and continued the translation of the Aristotelian corpus (approximately between 1260 and 1280), these translations quickly becoming the most popular versions. With him the medieval Latin Aristotelian corpus became fixed, the next attempts to retranslate belonging already to the new expectations and new ideals of the Humanist period.

The medieval Latin versions of Aristotle are documents of medieval thinking as important as the original works of medieval thinkers. As soon as this was realised by modern scholars, the edition of these texts started. This project was initiated in 1930 by the Union Académique Internationale and it contains two parts. The first is the publication of a catalogue of the translations by G. Lacombe and Lorenzo Minio-Paluello,⁶ and the second the series of *Aristoteles Latinus*, which contains critical editions of these texts, as well as the *Corpus Latinum Commentariorum in Aristotelem Graecorum*, which contains the translations of ancient Greek commentaries on Aristotle. All these are ongoing projects, which still are far from completion.

³ We know little about his life: he was a Venetian Greek cleric and philosopher from the twelfth century. The most comprehensive article on him is that of L. Minio-Paluello, "Iacobus Veneticus Grecus: Canonist and Translator of Aristotle," *Traditio* 8: 265–304.

⁴ James McEvoy, "Language, Tongue and Thought."

⁵ There could be several reasons for the fact that we have the last great translating enterprise in the second part of the thirteenth century, and that the next project of retranslation belongs already to the Renaissance. It is not the task of the present study to discuss this issue, yet we can observe that the outburst of translation activities is a concomitant phenomenon of periods of cultural prosperity.

⁶ G. Lacombe, ed., *Aristoteles Latinus. Codices: pars prior* (Rome: La Libreria dello Stato, 1939); G. Lacombe, ed., *Aristoteles Latinus. Codices: pars posterior* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955); L. Minio-Paluello, ed., *Aristoteles Latinus. Codices: Supplementa altera* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1961).

Description of sources

Apparently the most widespread book of the Philosopher in the Middle Ages was the *De anima*. If we examine the number of surviving manuscripts we can observe that it had even more exemplars in use than the *Metaphysics*.

The basic source material for our study⁷ is a fragment from the third book of Aristotle's *De anima*, namely the chapters about the cognitive faculties of humans: *DA* Book III, chapters 4–8. These four short chapters were widely influential in the Middle Ages: they provided the terminology with the help of which medieval philosophers were discussing the problem of intellection. For the debate in Paris about the unity of the intellect, a dispute between Thomas Aquinas and Siger of Brabant, this was the text on which they based on their arguments.

The main part of this article will consist of an analysis of Moerbeke's *De anima* translation and its interaction with the related commentaries. Although we will try to focus on Moerbeke's activity, we will use abundant comparative material from different periods. To determine the characteristic features of a medieval translation technique, we will compare Moerbeke's attempt with the *Vetus translatio* of James of Venice, one similar work from the Humanist period, namely the translation of Johannes Argyropulos of the *De anima*, as well as with modern English translations such as those of J. A. Smith, D. Ross and D. W. Hamlyn.

The first group of source material consists of the versions of the *De anima*. The main difficulty in our analysis is caused by the fact that the Latin *De anima* is not Moerbeke's own translation, but a revision of a former translation made by James of Venice in the twelfth century. The version of James has not yet been critically edited. The translation we have used is reconstructed by Clemens Stroick in his edition of Albert the Great's commentary on the *De anima*.⁸ The exact date when this translation was achieved is unknown, but the activity of

⁷ List of abbreviations concerning the source materials: *A* – Johannes Argyropulos' translation of Aristotle's *De anima* as it appears in the Bekker edition of Aristotle; *DA* – Aristotle's *De anima*; *N* – The *Nova translatio* of William of Moerbeke as it appears in the commentary of Thomas Aquinas; *P* – William of Moerbeke's translation of Philoponus' commentary on the *De anima*; *T* – William of Moerbeke's translation of Themistius' paraphrases to the *De anima*; *V* – The *Vetus translatio* of James of Venice as it appears in the commentary of Albert the Great.

⁸ Albertus Magnus, *De anima*, ed. Clemens Stroick (Aschendorf: Monasterium Westfalorum, 1968, hereafter cited as Stroick).



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James of Venice is usually fixed between 1125 and 1150. The approximate date of Albert's commentary is 1259–1260.⁹

There are some difficulties in the dating of the Moerbekian versions of the *De anima*. As has been demonstrated through a detailed analysis by Robert Wielockx,¹⁰ Moerbeke revised his version of the text. At the first stage he revised the already existing translation of James of Venice around 1260, and at a later stage he revised his own between 1266 and 1269. This revision is the so-called revision of Ravenna, which was treated by R. A. Gauthier as belonging to the first revision. But according to Wielockx, the differences are significant, and the methods and style used are characteristic of Moerbeke's later translations. There is one more partial revision of the text, as appears in the lemmas of Philoponus's commentary. As was pointed out by Minio-Paluello, this is a rather independent version, based on a different Greek manuscript edition.¹¹ The first version was reconstructed and edited by R. A. Gauthier in Aquinas' commentary on the *De anima*.¹² The version we find in John Philoponus' commentary, in form of lemmas, was edited by Gerard Verbeke.¹³ For the purposes of our study, the differences between the first revision and the Philoponus lemmas are relevant, therefore these will be the two variants we will reflect on.

The commentary of John Philoponus is fragmentarily translated, Moerbeke concentrating on the *De anima* 3.4–3.8, affirms that *reliqua huius operis non iudicavi oportere transferri*.¹⁴ In this case we know the exact date and place of the translation as given by Moerbeke: Viterbo, 17 December, 1268. This fragment, entitled *De intellectu*, was edited twice: by Marcel de Corte in 1934¹⁵ and by Gerard Verbeke in 1966. We have used here the later edition, and in

⁹ See Stroick, 1.

¹⁰ Robert Wielockx, "Guillaume de Moerbeke, réviseur de sa révision du *De anima*," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 54 (1987): 113–185.

¹¹ Minio-Paluello, "Le texte du *De anima* d'Aristote: la tradition Latine avant 1500," in *Opuscula* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1972), 263. According to him, the Greek manuscripts which Moerbeke was using were most probably from the group SUX (U-Vaticanus Grecus 260, S-Laurentianus 81.1, X-Ambrosianus H. 50, all from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), seemingly in the first version mainly in accordance with X, while in the Philoponus version mainly U. These manuscripts are used also by D. Ross in the establishing of the Greek critical edition of the *De anima*.

¹² *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia Iussu Leonis XIII P. M. edita*, vol. 45, 1: *Sententia Libri De anima*, ed. R. A. Gauthier (Paris: J. Vrin, 1984, hereafter cited as Gauthier).

¹³ Verbeke 1966.

¹⁴ Verbeke 1966, 119.

¹⁵ Marcel de Corte, *Le commentaire de Jean Philopon sur le troisième livre du Traite de l'âme d'Aristote*, (Liège: Faculté de philosophie et lettres, 1934).



analysing this text we took in consideration Fernand Bossier's emendations to this edition, as they appear in the English translation of William Charlton.¹⁶ The other problem with the text of Philoponus is that we no longer have the original of this chapter, only that for the first two books. In the edition of the Greek text¹⁷ there is another variant of the third book, which is not identical with the one used by Moerbeke. It seems that it was a later replacement.

The paraphrase of Themistius is translated in its entirety, and we also possess the Greek original.¹⁸ Again, the exact date and time are known: Viterbo, 22 November, 1267. This translation was edited by Verbeke in 1973.¹⁹ In the manuscript of this translation we can also find a fragment of Philoponus' commentary (a few pages from the beginning), which was probably the first attempt of Moerbeke to render this writing as well.

The next version from the tradition of the Latin *De anima* is the translation of Johannes Argyropoulos from the fifteenth century. He was a Byzantine scholar in Florence at the court of the Medici, and he "translated more works of Aristotle than any other fifteenth-century scholar and, in terms of output, compares favourably with William of Moerbeke."²⁰ Although he already belongs to a period with a new and radically different type of ideal of translation, his work is important in our investigation as a revision of the same Latin version. He returned to this text twice: firstly around 1460 and secondly around 1485. We do not have a critical edition of his work; therefore, the text we have used is his second version, published in the Bekker edition of Aristotle.²¹ From the point of view of our investigation, it is interesting to see how he reshapes the medieval translations, and under what kind of influence.

While Albert the Great still used the *Translatio Vetus* for his commentary, supplemented by the Arabico-Latin version, Thomas Aquinas was the first who had at his disposal the new version made by William of Moerbeke in the *Sententia libri de De Anima* (1267–1268) and the *De unitate intellectus* (1270). We

¹⁶ John Philoponus, *On Aristotle on the Intellect (de Anima 3.4–8)*.

¹⁷ M. Hayduck, ed., *Commentarium in "de Anima."*

¹⁸ R. Heinze, ed., *Librorum "De anima" paraphrasis*.

¹⁹ Verbeke, 1973, There is a recent article of Guldentops, "Some Critical Observations," 239–263, which contains important emendations to the text edited by Gerard Verbeke.

²⁰ Charles B. Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

²¹ *De anima*. tr. Johannes Argyropoulos, in *Aristotelis Opera*, ed. I. Bekker, vol. 3 (Berlin: Georgius Reimerus, 1831, hereafter cited as Bekker).



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shall see whether the use of different versions leads to different understandings of the text in Albert's and Aquinas' commentaries.

Another important reference material is the Arabico-Latin translation made by Michael Scotus around 1220–1235.²² It was translated as part of the commentary of Averroes. Although we are mainly concerned with the Graeco-Latin tradition, this translation is important for our study as a complementary text, one which was used by the medieval commentators. We cannot judge its value as a translation, but we are interested in its influence on the reading of medieval philosophers.

Since we possess several versions of the same text from different periods, and several treatises from the same field, by comparing them we have the opportunity to observe a medieval translator at work. We can detect his methods, his translating strategy, the development of his terminology.

Modern English translations could be useful in terms of comparison as well, especially if they are accompanied by textual commentaries. In this way, we can see whether the problematic terms and passages were the same for all of them, and if not, see which parts are accentuated differently, and how they relate to Aristotle's original work.

The first translation to examine is the one made by J. A. Smith in 1931.²³ The most important text to be considered is the commented translation of David Ross, which accompanied his critical edition of the Greek text, published in 1961.²⁴ The other commented translation is that of D. W. Hamlyn, published in 1968,²⁵ the most recent one known to me. This translation is concerned only with Books II and III, and several fragments of the first book.

γνω=σιφ and φρο/νησιφ: DA 429a 10

William of Moerbeke, translating the third chapter of the *De anima* of Aristotle, translates the passage
περι< δε< του= μορι/ου του= τη=φ ψυξη=φ %ϝ γνω/σκει τε η<
ψυξη< και< φρονει= (429a 10) as follows: *de parte autem animae qua cognoscit anima*

²² Averroes, *Commentarium Magnum in Aristotelis De anima libros*. There is a French translation accompanied by a study on Averroes by Alain de Libera: Averroes, *L'Intelligence et la Pensée*, (Paris: GF Flammarion, 1998).

²³ In Aristotle, *The Complete Works. The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1984, hereafter cited as Smith).

²⁴ D. Ross, ed., *Aristotle: De anima* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961, hereafter cited as Ross).

²⁵ D. W. Hamlyn, tr. *Aristotle: De anima Books II, III* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968, hereafter cited as Hamlyn).

et sapit. But translating the commentary of Philoponus on this passage, he changes the *sapit* to *prudential*: *de parte autem animae qua cognoscit anima et prudential*. The question arises as to what led the translator to change the words. What was the nuance he neglected the first time around? In order to ascertain his understanding of the word, we will analyse a few selected passages from his translation and compare it with Humanist and modern English translations.

The restricted family derived from the root φρον- contains three words: the verb φρονεω, the noun φρονησιφ, and the adjective φρονημοφ.²⁶ Next to these, many other related terms exist as well: φρονημα, φροντιζειν, σωφρων, and ευφροων.

According to the dictionary, the verb φρονεω means in the first place *to have understanding, to be wise, to be prudent, to think rightly, to comprehend, to be minded to do*. The noun φρονησιφ means *purpose, intention, thought, judgement, pride, practical wisdom, prudence*, and the adjective φρονημοφ *wise, sensible, and prudent*.

In the dictionary of Peters only the noun-form is given. According to the author, at the origin of this term is the belief that there is always “some sort of intellectual control in virtue.”²⁷ In Plato, this term does not have any ethical and practical nuance; rather, it designates the contemplation of the Ideas, as a supreme type of knowledge. In Aristotle there are many senses of the word: in a first phase we can observe a Platonic type of usage, and starting with the *Nicomachean Ethics* this notion regains its moral dimension, theoretical knowledge being designated with the term σοφια. Plotinus retains the moral sense of the word as well, considering it a virtue.

Pierre Aubenque wrote a theoretical analysis of this problem, in his book *La prudence chez Aristote*.²⁸ The starting point for him is a genetic distinction between the two usages of Aristotle. He detected passages from the works of the initial period where Aristotle makes use of the so-called Platonic sense of this word, in contrast with opinion and sense perception. In these fragments φρονησιφ is usually accompanied by επιστημη or γνωσιφ, in order to designate the highest form of science, which is in fact identical to σοφια.²⁹ But starting

²⁶ These are the only terms which occur in the *De anima*.

²⁷ Francis E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms* (New York: New York University Press, 1967) 224.

²⁸ Aubenque, *La prudence chez Aristote* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963).

²⁹ επιστημη τινοφ και φρονησιφ (*Metaf. M, 1078b 15*);

γνωσιφ ηφ φρονησιφ (*De coelo, III, 1, 298b 23*);

διανοια επιστασθαι και φρονειν (*Physics, VII, 3, 247b, 11*);

φρονημον και επιστημον (*Physics, VII, 3, 247b, 18*);

προφ τε γνωσιν και την κατα φιλοσοφιαν φρονειν (*Topic. VIII, 14, 163b, 9*).



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with the *Nicomachean Ethics* it is no longer a science, but a dianoetic virtue.³⁰ It is “degraded” and turns, from being a supreme science, into a virtue of the opinative part of the soul, which operates in the contingent world. According to Aubenque, this latter sense of the term occurs only in the moral treatises.³¹ The author concludes that the usage of the term in Aristotle has two origins: a Platonic one and one taken from the archaic Greek tradition. In the following we are going to use the terms *Platonic meaning* and *traditional meaning* to distinguish between the two senses. The Platonic meaning refers to the highest science of the Supreme Being, with the same reference as ἐπιστη/μη or γνῶσις or νοῦς. The traditional sense is a moral one. Trying to define it, Aristotle said that it is neither science nor art, so it has to be a practical disposition. It is at the same time a virtue, one which determines the rules of choice, choice belonging to the field of moral virtue. What distinguishes it from science and wisdom is that while wisdom is concerned with absolute Good and Evil, the domain of φρο/νησις is good and evil for humans, being a type of knowledge of a limited area.

After this short historical presentation of the term, we will now analyse the role of this word in the *De anima*, its commentaries and the Latin translations of these made by William of Moerbeke. The sources we are going to analyse are the following: fragments from the Latin *De anima* made by Moerbeke (the so-called *translatio Nova*) contrasted to the *translatio Vetus* of James of Venice, and the commentaries of Themistius and Philoponus, comparing these with the Humanist translation of Johannes Argyropulos and modern English translations. The way Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas commented on these passages will also be examined.

According to a statistical analysis,³² the terms φρο/νεῶ, φρο/νησις and φρο/νιμοῦ appear in the *De anima* thirteen times, prevalently in the verbal form.³³ The commentary of Philoponus is translated only from the fourth chapter of the third book, and so we have only one reference to this term (429a 11). As far as Themistius’ commentary is concerned, we have more data, the translation being complete.

³⁰ The term “dianoetic” (as opposed to “noetic”) denotes discursive reasoning: *E. N.*, I, 13, 1103a, 6; VI, 2, 1139a 1; VI, 5, 1140b 1.

³¹ Aubenque, *La prudence*, 23.

³² Gerald Purnelle, *Aristote: De anima: index verborum* (Liège: C.I.P.L., 1988).

³³ The complete list of appearances: 404b 5 (φρο/νεσις), 417b 8 (φρο/νη), 417b 8, 417 b 11 (φρονου=ν), 421a 22 (φρονισμω/τατον) 427a 18, 427a 19, 427a 22, 427a 24, 427a 28, 427b 7 (φρονει=ν), 427b 10, 427b 25 (φρο/νεσις), 429a 11 (φρονει=).

On first examination we can already observe several synonyms in the translation variants.

404b 5:

ου) φαι/νεται δ' οἷ γε κατα< φρο/νησιν λεγο/μενοφ νου=φ πα=σιν ο(μοι/ωφ υ(π α/ρξιν τοι=φ ζ%/οιφ, α)λλα ου)δε< τοι=φ α)νθρω/ποιφ πα=σιν.

T: *non qui secundum sapientiam intellectus dicitur, non omnibus similiter inest animalibus.*³⁴

421a 22: διο/ φρονιμ/ωτατο/ν ε)στι τω=ν ζ%/ων

T: *propter quod et prudentissimus animalium est homo.*³⁵

417b 8–11:

διο/ ου) καλω=φ ε©ξει λε/γειν το< φρονου=ν, οἷταν φρονω=, α)λλοιου=σθαι, ωἷσπερ ου)δε< το< ο)ικοδο/μον οἷταν ο)ικοδομω=.

T: *propter hoc non bene habet dicere habentem prudentiam quando prudenter agit alterari; neque enim aedificatorem quando aedificat,*³⁶

427a 18–23:

Ε)πει< δε< δυ/ο διαφοραι=φ ο(ρι/ζονται μα/λιστα τη/ν ψυη/ν, κινη/σει τε τω κατα< το/πον και< τ%= νοει=ν και< φρονει=ν και< αι)σθα/νεσθαι, δοκει= δ ε< και

το/ νοει=ν και< το/ φρονει=ν ωἷσπερ αι)σθα/νεσθαι τι ει)πναι (ε)ν α)μφοτε/ροι φ γα<ρ του/τοιφ κρι/νει τι η(ψυξη< και< γνωρι/ζει τω=ν ο©ντων), και< οιἷ γε α)ρξαι=οι το/ φρονει=ν και< το< αι)σθα/νεσθαι ταυτο<ν ει)πναι/ φασιν [..] οἷτι με ου)πν ου)

ταυ)το/ν ε)στι το/ αι)σθα/νεσθαι και< το< φρονει=ν, φανερο/ν.

T: *Quoniam autem dicimus non solum sensu coenoscere et iudicare, sed et ratione et mente, quid utique differant indicatoria haec ab invicem, considerandum deinceps. Quod autem non inutilis inquisitio sit, palam ex antiquioribus physicis; fere enim isti faciunt sensum idem rationi.*³⁷

From these passages it is already obvious that the translation into Latin can be difficult, because the actualisation of the Platonic and the traditional meaning at the same time is impossible. Transposing this notion to a different linguistic surrounding had as a result the loss of some nuances. From the passages analysed it becomes clear that the translator was conscious of these

³⁴ Verbeke 1973, 25.

³⁵ Verbeke 1973, 156.

³⁶ Verbeke 1973, 129.

³⁷ Verbeke 1973, 201.

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two meanings. The proof that he felt something from the polyphony of the word is that we can find many variants in the texts, which try to catch the manifold meaning of the Greek term.

The main passage where we have more variants is 429a10:

περι< δε< του= μορι/ου του= τη=φ ψυξη=φ %Π γινω/σκει τε η(ψυξη< και< φρονει=

We can find the following versions:

V: *De parte animae autem, qua cognoscit anima, et sapit.*³⁸

N: *De parte autem animae qua cognoscit et sapit.*³⁹

P: *De parte autem animae qua cognoscit anima et prudentiat.*⁴⁰

T: *De parte autem animae qua utimur ad theoriam et actionem.*⁴¹

We have here three varying translations of the same word. But before judging which one is more appropriate, we should define to which category of usage this verb belongs in this context. The translator tries to keep the semantic resonance of ethics and practical knowledge. But the way this term appears here reminds us of the Platonic usage. It appears in the same sentence, in syntactic and semantic parallelism (indeed, almost a formal redundancy based on synonymy) with γινω/σκει, just as it does in the passages quoted by Aubenque as examples of Platonic meaning. To the same argument we can add that while in the *Nicomachean Ethics* the prevalent form is that of the noun, in the cases with Platonic usage we find more verbs, as in the present case. The same synonymy appears in the passage below: νοει=v και< φρονει=v (427a 18). According to these arguments, and similarly in concordance with the relevant fragments from the *De anima* (417b 8–11, 427 a 18–b 25), we can conclude that the meaning as detected in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is irrelevant in the case of the *De anima*, where νο/ησιφ and φρο/νησιφ are at the same level and in the same category of intellectual cognition, as opposed to perceptive cognition.

However, the commentators, who knew very well the moral writings of Aristotle, perhaps even knowing the sense of the word from current usage, tried to reflect on this dimension of the word. For example, Philoponus, commenting on the passage 429a 10, says the following:

Cum dixisset de vegetativa anima et sensitiva et phantastica, ut simpliciter autem dicatur de irrationali, transit ad doctrinam de rationali anima. Prius autem de existimatione facit sermonem, dico autem de opinativo et meditativo. Quod enim

³⁸ Stroick, 177.

³⁹ Gauthier, 202.

⁴⁰ Verbeke 1966, 1.

⁴¹ Verbeke 1973, 213.



non sit nunc sermo de speculativo intellectu et de vocato secundum habitum insinuat per hoc quod dicit qua cognoscit anima et prudentiat. Prudentiare enim circa agibilia fit, circa haec enim prudentia; speculativus autem intellectus non negotiatur circa agibilia.

*Per cognoscit cognitivas animae potentias significat, per prudentiat autem activas; in duo enim haec potentiae animae dividuntur, scilicet in speculativum et activum. Prudentia autem circa practica vel agibilia: hoc enim consuevimus prudentiam vocare, circa contingentia aliter se habere bene gerere.*⁴²

This passage could have influenced Moerbeke to change the term he had once chosen, and to stick with *prudentia*. R. A. Gauthier, arguing that the moral of Aristotle is an intellectualist one, does not agree with the translation by *prudence* in modern languages, which for him neglects the theoretical nuance of this term, considering that *wisdom* would be more appropriate. Moerbeke tried this with the term *sapit*, which seemed to provide a good balance between (or combination of) theory and practice, but the problem is that the noun which was derived from this verb, *sapientia*, became identical with *scientia*, both meaning in fact σοφία, the supreme science. This was in fact the association made by Albert the Great, who commented on a version of the *Vetus* as follows:

*De parte autem animae rationalis, qua ipsa anima cognoscit distinguendo et formando agibilia et factibilia, quae pars intellectus activus arte et prudentia perfectus vocatur, et de parte animae, qua anima sapit prima et vera et ea quae per prima et vera accipiunt fidem – quae pars sapientia et intellectu principiorum perficitur et scientia et vocatur intellectus contemplativus – quaerere intendimus...*⁴³

Albert arrived at an original differentiation, which contradicts the distinction made by the Ancient commentators and which was followed by Moerbeke in his translation of the lemmas in Philoponus' commentary. For Albert, as for all Ancient and medieval commentators, these terms signified two different types of cognition. Albert inverts the two concepts in his interpretation. For him, the concept related to *prudentia* is *cognoscit*, and *sapit* is the one which implies theoretical, contemplative knowledge, clearly related here to *sapientia*.

Thomas Aquinas also, in his commentary, considered it necessary to distinguish between the two terms, in spite of the fact that he used the version with *sapit*.

⁴² Verbeke 1966, 1–2.

⁴³ Stroick, 177.



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*Supra autem dictum est quod differt inter sapere et intelligere: nam sapere pertinet ad iudicium intellectus, intelligere autem ad eius apprehensionem.*⁴⁴

The variant from Themistius is in fact a periphrasis: *utimur ad actionem*, which reflects the opposition between theory and practice, φρο/νησιφ meaning not only a faculty but the exercise, the operation, of such human faculties. It might be that at this stage Moerbeke had still not come to coin the verb derived from this *prudentia*, a verb which did not exist in Classical Latin. This presupposition seems to be confirmed by the other analytic form, the one of *prudenter agit*, which again tries to keep the active and practical character of this type of knowledge. The verb *ago* (here “to act”) is not the only form from his family of words: the objects of that mode of cognition which is φρο/νησιφ are τὰ πρᾶκτα, which is translated into Latin by *agibilia*,⁴⁵ that is to say, objects of action, operation, in contrast with *factibilia*, objects of production. Another term used by Moerbeke, which appears in the translation of Themistius’ work, is *ratio*. The choice of this term could have been motivated by the fact that in the context quoted above our term is opposed to the senses. If this is the sense of the passage, then this option for *ratio* is justified in this given context.

We can see that it would be hard to choose one ideal option. This is first of all because φρο/νησιφ has a lot of meanings, from which the two used by Aristotle appear to preclude each other: the Platonic meaning of the theoretical science, and the traditional sense of the practical science, which implies activity and a moral nuance, may be mutually incompatible. The Latin version always tries to take into consideration both senses of the word, but Aristotle never used the term with both meanings intended or implied at the same time. The sense in question is usually activated by the context: in the *Nicomachean Ethics* it is almost always the practical meaning. The frequency of the noun form shows to us that we have a well-defined concept, the basis of part of a system of morality for Aristotle. In this case *prudentia* is an appropriate solution, even taking in consideration Gauthier’s criticism: the Latin word has a much more intellectual character than the French or English “prudence.” But in the case of the *De anima* there is no need to accentuate the traditional meaning. The semantic parallelism confirms it, as does the occurrence of verbal forms, which are characteristic of these kind of structures. Of course with the appearance of several terms like *ratio*, *sapio*, *iudicare*, and so on, together with the fact that we use different terms for the nuances of the same term, we lose any other

⁴⁴ Gauthier, 202. As Gerard Verbeke pointed out, this is a different distinction. The Ancient commentators distinguished between theoretical and practical knowledge, Thomas is referring to the difference between understanding and judgement.

⁴⁵ *Prudentiare enim circa agibilia fit* (Verbeke 1966, 1).

different possibilities of interpretation, such as any connection with notions like σοφροσύνη.

Modern English translations, like that of David Ross, are not concerned with this term. Ross translated the problematic passage as follows: “with regard to the part by which the soul knows and thinks.”⁴⁶ He obviously understood this pair of terms as synonyms. Moreover, there are no comments on this fragment in the textual commentary which follows the translation, while we can see that both Philoponus and Themistius felt it important to reflect on this part of the text.

Basing our analysis on Argyropulos’ translation, we should now compare the Humanist technique with the medieval one.⁴⁷ The main passage we are concerned with is the same: *De animae autem ea parte qua cognoscit atque sapit*. This is similar to Moerbeke’s first version, the one used by Thomas Aquinas. The first thing to be observed is that in the Greek and medieval Latin we had the word *anima* twice, while here it occurs only once. We also have a demonstrative pronoun related to *parte*, which I suspect serves to replace the Greek article. Concerning the important terms from this passage, *sapit* needs to be examined. Why did he prefer this form?

Fortunately, the whole translation of Argyropulos has survived, and therefore we have the opportunity to check the other twelve occurrences of the term.⁴⁸ As we can see from the examples from the passages 404b 5, 421a 22,

⁴⁶ Ross, 289.

⁴⁷ We are aware of the fact that it is dangerous to make general statements on the basis of one example. Johannes Argyropulos was a Greek scholar: his attitude towards the Latin language and culture has to be examined from this point of view as well. Thus, since he represents a different type of intellectual, occupying a neutral position in the clash between the university masters and Humanists, one can argue to what extent his work is representative for the Humanist ideal of translation. See the remark of F. E. Cranz on Greek translators: “it is worth noting that the fifteenth-century translations of Aristotle were largely the work of Byzantine rather than of Latin scholars, with the notable exception of Leonardo Bruni. The explanation may lie in the fact that the Byzantine tradition of learning included philosophy in a way that Latin humanism did not.” See F. E. Cranz, “The Renaissance Reading of the *De anima*,” in *Platon et Aristote à la Renaissance* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1976), 360.

⁴⁸ “at ea mens tamen, et intellectus cui prudentia tribuitur, non modo universis similiter animalibus, sed ne hominibus quidem omnibus esse videtur” (404b 5); “quocirca non recte se habet dicere ipsum sciens, cum scit, alterari, sicut nec aedificatorem cum aedificat” (417b 8–11); “quapropter et prudentissimum est animalium” (421a 22); “videtur namque tam intelligere quam etiam sapere veluti quoddam sentire... veteres idem esse sapere sentireque censent... sentire simili similo arbitrantur et sapere... id est



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427b 10 and 427b 25, Argyropulos knew about the term *prudentia* and he even made use of it in a consistent way. But he used only the noun form. Whenever the verb form occurred in Greek, he rendered it by *sapere*. We can observe here an application of one of the ideas of Humanist translation theory. The term *prudentialiare* is a neologism invented by Moerbeke in order to face the challenges of the Greek text, while the noun is a Classical Latin word already used by Cicero. Wherever Argyropulos needed the noun form, he replaced the Greek with *prudentia*. But when a verbal form occurred, he used the classical term *sapere*. It is an example of the attempt of the Humanists to return to Classical Latin, which, according to them, was seriously damaged by the horrifying practice of Latin in the Middle Ages.⁴⁹

Conclusion

We started this article with an optimistic conjecture about the importance of the translations in the Latin tradition of the *De anima*. As a demonstration of this fact, we aimed to show that there existed a close relationship between the text and its commentaries, and that they influenced each other in a very complex way. Thus, Moerbeke's translation was influenced by the Ancient commentators he read; Albert's reading was influenced by the *Vetus* and by the *translatio Arabica*; Thomas' new interpretations were based on the *Nova*; the Humanist translator preferred the terminology of the Arab version. Certainly we could illustrate the point that the interaction between text and commentary was during this (rather long) period a complex relation of influences, many reciprocal, which developed on different levels. Nevertheless, there is place in this concluding chapter for some critical remarks as well.

From the point of view of this study one of the most interesting features of Moerbeke's methods of translation is the use of Ancient commentaries. Comparing his first revision with the lemmas of Philoponus' commentary, we

prudentia et scientia atque opinio vera... scientia et opinio et prudentia, et ea quae sunt his contraria" (427a 18 – 427b 25).

⁴⁹ Still, our conclusion seems to contradict the common belief about Renaissance translations. The version of Argyropulos, as we will try to show with further examples, is not so different from the medieval one: there are no different stylistic features, the same methods of structuring can be found in both of them, and one can note the same care concerning the consistency of the terms. As a first supposition we can suggest major discrepancies, or at least differences, between Humanist theory and practice, and posit continuity with the medieval traditional methods, especially in the case of Aristotle.

notice that wherever he modified his previous version, it was done as a reaction to what the commentators affirmed about the subject matter. We may arrive at this conclusion simply by analysing a couple of terms and some passages which appeared as obscure and problematic in the *Vetus*.

Concerning the terminology, we may conclude that there is an attempt at uniformity in Moerbeke's word choice: after several versions using *sapere*, *iudicare*, *agere*, *prudentiare* for the verb $\phi\rho\nu\epsilon/\omega$, and *ratio*, *sapientia*, *prudencia* for the noun $\phi\rho\sigma/\nu\eta\sigma\iota\phi$, in his last translation he opted for the *prudentiare*, *prudencia* forms, and henceforth used them consistently everywhere. We can detect here a conscious attempt to create a philosophical terminology, while at the same time he paid less attention to the context, since the translation did not always need this level of precision. Nothing in the Greek text justifies such distinctions, which means that Moerbeke knew about the meanings of the words from elsewhere. He probably modified his terms because of the interpretation of the commentaries which reflect upon these terms.⁵⁰ It seems that although he rarely changes the terms which are fixed in the *Vetus*, whenever he does so, it is in accordance with the Ancient commentators whom he consulted. In this respect the works of Themistius and Philoponus were his tools of translation.

In the case of this sample analysis, we have observed that medieval commentators also distinguished between the terms involved in the discussion. Although both the *Vetus* and the *Nova* gave *sapit* for $\phi\rho\nu\epsilon/\omega$, Albert gives an interpretation which conflates the two terms, based on a connection between *sapit* and *sapientia*.

As a concluding remark about the ideal of the regular lexical correspondence of the medieval translators, we cannot but agree with Alain de Libera's affirmation: "Les textes latins d'Aristote sont donc plus systématiques que l'original—plus exactement, ils en durcissent ou en atténuent alternativement les oppositions."

Furthermore, the relative prestige of the texts and the commentaries has to be taken into account. In the case of the *Nova*, it is necessary to reflect on the

⁵⁰ It could be also possible that he revised Grosseteste's version of the *Nicomachean Ethics* between the first and the second revision of the *De anima*. We cannot prove this presupposition, but it might help as an auxiliary argument for an already established chronology. There have been a few attempts to find out the chronological order of the translations, such as those of L. Minio-Paluello, P. Thillet, G. Verbeke, Jozef Brams, F. Bossier, and R. Wielockx. According to the latest results, there were two revisions of the *De anima*: in 1260 Moerbeke revised the version of James of Venice, and in 1266–1269 his own version. Another phase of development is represented by the *De anima* lemmas from the Philoponus commentary. The revision of the *Nicomachean Ethics* took place presumably before 1270.



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fact that the interval which we are trying to cover is the initial period of the dissemination of the new translation. At this stage it had not yet entirely replaced the old version: we can observe, with Thomas Aquinas, an alternative use of the two versions. The authority of the old version was even more intensified by the fact that it was considered the work of Boethius. For a more “global” picture of the use of the *Nova*, one should analyse other commentaries from the end of the thirteenth and from the fourteenth century. Moreover, it would be interesting to study the competitive-alternative use of the *Nova* and the new Humanist versions in the Renaissance.

Nevertheless, we have to be aware of the limits of our methodology. The texts used in the academic milieu of the Middle Ages were often transformed either simply by accident by scribes who copied erroneously, or even quite consciously, by the masters of the university, where they considered such changes to be necessary. We cannot arrive at any “original” translation of James of Venice or William of Moerbeke: even as their versions were spreading, they were continuously being transformed.⁵¹

However, the same problems can open up new fields for further study. The differences between the various versions of the *Vetus* and the *Nova* as they appear in commentaries, and the parallel usage of different translations, deserve detailed research. The comparative study of the Graeco-Latin and Arabico-Latin versions was only touched upon in this paper, but it appears from this that the Arab interpretations of Aristotle were influential not only on the level of commentaries, but also as a means of understanding the Aristotelian text itself.

Applying this approach to other translations and commentaries may lead us to interesting findings concerning the (in)dependence of the translation: to what extent the text precedes the interpretations, to what extent the commentaries influence the translations, and which elements are that influence this interaction, are just a few fascinating questions which are still to be answered.

⁵¹ Gauthier, 129*.