

## **ALBERT, AND ARISTOTLE: WONDER AND THE DEVIL IN THE DETAILS**

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“πολυμαθίη νόον οὐ διδάσκει” Heraclitus DK B40 (D.L.)

While Albert (1200-1280) and his student Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) are often celebrated for their commentaries on Aristotle and the part that they played in re-introducing Aristotle to the Latin west, it fell to the hands of later thinkers to get him right. Albert and Thomas' 13th Century translations of and commentaries on Aristotle reveal a belief that the aim of metaphysics is to reduce coincidence, evil portents, superstition and prodigy to causal reasoning. Metaphysics becomes a science of causes aimed at of banishing wonder, superstition and fear. But they got it wrong. Their readings of Aristotle rely on the Latin translations of the *Metaphysics* of James of Venice (d. 1141), and William of Moerbeke (1215-1286). It is not until the translation of Bessarion of Trabzon (1403-1472), that the Latin west gets a proper sense of Aristotle's true understanding of the aim and scope of metaphysical wonder. I argue that Latin translators of the *Metaphysics* like James, Michael Scot (1175-1232) and Moerbeke, and commentators like Duns Scotus (1266-1308), Aquinas and Albert all lacked one thing that Bessarion did not, namely a copy Alexander of Aphrodisias' commentary on the *Metaphysics*, which was extant only in Constantinople. Bessarion's translation of the *Metaphysics* reflects his use of this commentary, and corrects the faulty conception of Aristotle as a banisher of wonder. Unlike his 13<sup>th</sup> Century predecessors, Bessarion's translation suggests that Aristotle calls upon us to wonder at how all things in the heavens and below the moon, from the political, to the biological, to the mechanical, imitate the Unmoved Mover.

For the Scholastics, wonder at God's greatness in creating the universe is acceptable, but curiosity and inquiry into the workings of the universe is considered to be inappropriate knowledge. Despite using Aristotle as their champion, they miss the spirit of Aristotelian inquiry.