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Tomas Nejeschleba

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The Platonic Framework of Valeriano Magni's Philosophy¹

Tomas Nejeschleba

The Capuchin friar Valeriano Magni published his first philosophical work De luce mentium in Rome in 1642 and it was soon recognized as an approach similar to René Descartes. Although Marin Mersenne recommended that Magni reads Cartesius, he did not feel the need to follow this advice.2 Magni was deeply influenced, however, by his reading of Galileo Galilei whom he defended, whose works he unsuccessfully tried to publish, and whom he followed by means of his own experiments demonstrating the existence of the void.³ Despite certain similarities between Magni's philosophy and Descartes and in spite of the influence exerted by the natural philosophy of Galileo Galilei and of William Gilbert, his philosophy indicates different foundations than Descartes' rationalism and early modern physics. Magni aimed to create a new, Christian philosophical system which would be in concord with both the new sciences and the metaphysics of the medieval Platonic tradition. In my contribution I will analyze certain features of Magni's philosophy, which manifest that he can be assessed as a genuine follower of Plato. I will show that Platonism constitutes the fundamental framework of Valeriano Magni's thought.

First I will briefly introduce this at present little known 17th century thinker, his life and main works. Valeriano Magni was born in Milan in 1586, as a child he moved to Prague where he entered the Capuchin order. After completing his order studies he taught philosophy in Capuchin monasteries in Prague, Vienna and Linz. He became the head of the Czech-Austrian province of the Capuchin order, served as an advisor to the Prague Archbishop Cardinal Harrach and as a legate of the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide (from 1629). He was involved in contemporary polemics concerning the re-Catholization of the

¹ This study is a result of the research funded by the Czech Science Foundation as the project GA ČR 14-37038G "Between Renaissance and Baroque: Philosophy and Knowledge in the Czech Lands within the Wider European Context".

² Cf. Blum (1998) 116.

³ Cf. Cygan (1969) 135–66.

⁴ Cf. Sousedík (1982), 12–65; Cygan (1989).

Czech Lands, where he advocated nonviolent methods, and in controversies regarding the organization of Prague University.⁵ He was a keen opponent of the Jesuits in both.

His first theological work *Iudicium de Acatholicorum et Catholicorum regula credendi*, published in 1628 was reprinted many times and provoked huge polemics between Magni and protestant theologians of different denominations.⁶ Then Magni entered into philosophical discussions by his already mentioned work *De Luce mentium et eius imagine* (Rome 1642).⁷ Later Magni left a mark in the history of science and natural philosophy as he successfully performed experiments demonstrating the existence of the vacuum in 1648. When the description of the experiment was published, another huge polemic followed.⁸ Since then Magni sharpened his critique of Aristotelianism by means of his defense of Galileo Galilei.

His Antiaristotelianism reached its most comprehensive form in his last unfinished work *Opus philosophicum* (1660), which includes a synopsis of Aristotelian philosophy, a critique of Aristotelianism, and a description of Magni's own logic, metaphysics, epistemology, and natural philosophy. By the end of his life Magni had intensified attacks not only on Aristotelian scholasticism but also on the Jesuits. Subsequently, he was arrested in Vienna and sent to see the Pope in 1661. He died in Salzburg on the way to Rome.

The Platonic framework of Magni's philosophy can be deduced not only from his ardent Antiaristotelianism. As a member of the Capuchin order Magni was educated to a great respect for the medieval Platonic tradition. In the last decades of the 16th century the education within the Capuchin order began to focus on the legacy of St. Bonaventure in opposition to the Franciscans, who based their philosophy and theology on John Duns Scotus. For the Capuchins St. Bonaventure was the main authority in the realm of theology in particular, while they still followed Aristotle in the realm of philosophy, as it was common in Scholasticism.⁹

Magni also initially taught philosophy according to Aristotle, as his synopsis of Aristotelian philosophy indicates. Later Magni professes in

⁵ Cf. Louthan (2004) 681–99.

⁶ Cf. da Novara (1937).

⁷ Cf. the Latin edition with the Czech translation Magni (2016).

⁸ Cf. Bucciantini (1994) 73–91; Gorman (1994) 7–32, Cygan (2002).

⁹ Cf. Elpert (2008), 349–93, Bérubé (1974) 275–330.

his second book *De peripatu* and in *Opus philosophicum* that he had earlier admired Aristotle and liked his metaphysics which contradicted the metaphysics of Plato. ¹⁰ Although he now criticized Aristotelianism and thus one would think that Magni aimed to follow Platonism, this is surprisingly the only important reference to Plato in his mature work. But it does not follow that Magni's philosophy is not Platonic.

Magni mentions Plato in his first philosophical work *De Luce mentium* in a very important context, which sheds light on his understanding of the tradition he was following. Speaking about the immutable and eternal light of minds, Magni gives examples of persons who obtained divine illumination which is the same in different people and in different periods. The divine illumination of Euclid does not differ from the illumination of Plato, as the excitation of love in Abram is the same as the excitation of love in St. Francis.¹¹

The importance of the accentuation of Plato and Euclid becomes apparent in light of the fact that in his entire work Magni hardly quotes any authority. He even states that he never cites any authority to avoid being accused of misunderstanding someone's thought. There are some exceptions, of course. Magni massively quotes from Aristotle with the goal of criticizing his philosophy and he occasionally mentions authorities he follows in the realm of natural philosophy, i.e.,

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¹⁰ Magni (1660) I, tr. 2, cap. 22, 148: "Mirabar tamen, Platonem propterea eo adactum esse, ut poneres ideas, velut plura entia separate. Et mihi placebant pleraque quae in primo Metaph. Aristoteles habet in contrarium." Cf. Magni (1648) *De peripatu* II, 22, 241.

¹¹ Magni (2016) cap. 19, 118: "Itaque Lux mentium immutabilis et aeterna ea est, quae v. g. dedit Euclidi intelligere rationem circuli eandem illi, quam intellexit aut intellecturus sit quivis alius de humano genere. Lux mentium immutabilis et aeterna, quae v. g. excitavit voluntatem Abrahae ad amandum Deum, est illa ipsa, qua excitati sunt aut excitabuntur reliqui, qui amarunt vel amaturi sunt Deum. Divinum lucere Euclidi, divinum excitare amorem in Abrahamo non sunt actiones divinae, distinctae a divino lucere Platoni et a divino excitare amorem in Francisco: sed Lux mentium aeternaliter et incommutabiliter definit v. g. rationem circuli et dat amari Deum, licet sub distinctis temporum differentiis distincti homines illuminentur et caleant a Luce mentium."

¹² Magni (1660) tr. 3, cap. 5, 6: "Trado meam Philosophiam, nullo citato Auctore, ne reprehendar, quod non intellexerim eorum sententiam, neve hoc Opus evadat in librum librorum." Cf. Blum (1998) 103.

Copernicus, Galilei, and Gilbert, who helped him to refute Aristotelianism.¹³

References to St. Augustine and St. Bonaventure, the models of Magni's philosophy and theology who were prescribed by the order tradition, are another exception to Magni's habit not to quote. In the last two chapters of his first philosophical work *De Luce mentium* Valeriano evaluates his own philosophy as merely a continuation of their thought. Thus, Lucas Wadding, the author of the "approbatio" introducing Magni's book, describes it as a mystical treatise derived from St. Bonaventure. Magni later aims to underline his dependence on St. Augustine and St. Bonaventure in a book with the title *On the light of minds and its image* and the subtitle *ex Sanctis Patribus Augustino et Bonaventura*. There he made an effort to show that his own philosophy is in real concord with these exponents of Platonic tradition.

Despite this, Valeriano Magni tries to construct his philosophy independently of any authority by means of concentrating upon an analysis of his own cognitive processes. This is the intrinsic reason for not quoting any authority. Introspection as a method of philosophizing from the "I" does not need to recall any tradition and authority. Although in using the introspection method he might resemble Descartes, Valeriano Magni adopted it from both St. Augustine and St. Bonaventure, indirectly citing the claim "entre into our mind" of St. Bonaventure's *Itinerary of Mind into God*, for only "inside the man

¹³ Magni (1648) *De peripatu* I, cap. 2, 12: "Ego suscipio in Astrologia Ioannem (sic) Copernicum, in eadem facultate et nonnullis quaestionibus physicis Galileum de Galileis, in revelanda occulta natura magnetis, quae, rite cognita, aperit viam perscrutanti structuram machinae mundanae, Gulielmum Rhobertum Anglum."

¹⁴ Magni (2016) cap. 23, 146: "Sed non me subduco ab hoc tractatu, nisi cognoscas et Augustinum et Bonaventuram inter reliquos hanc Lucem et ejus imaginem intellexisse non aliter, quam ut explicavi. Ibid., cap. 24, 148: "Imo vix puto extare eximium doctorem ecclesiasticum, qui non habeat pleraque similia his, quae protuli ex Augustino; quos tamen non commemoro: sed unum Bonaventuram adjungo Ordinis Sancti Francisci quondam generalem et demum S<anctae> R<omanae> E<cclesiae> cardinalem."

¹⁵ Magni (1642) Approbatio, 4: Argumentum continet non adeo novum, quia S. Bonaventura, alijsque Asceticis viris fuerit praemonstratum. Cf. Blum (1998) 109.

¹⁶ Magni (1645).

¹⁷ Cf. Blum (1998) 110ff.

lives the truth", as St. Augustine states. ¹⁸ St. Augustine and St. Bonaventure taught Magni to take two steps needed for introspection: to turn inward, and to focus on the inner mental states. ¹⁹ Introspection, Platonic in origin, constitutes the foundation of Magni's approach to all philosophical issues and thus, as a starting point of philosophizing, plays a crucial role in Magni's thought. All other features of Magni's philosophy must be derived from this initial methodological claim.

Also other aspects of Magni's thought can be considered as Platonic in their origin. Magni states that the human mind flies through two realms. The first one is a realm of so-called existing things, which comprises angels, the heaven, the stars, elements, minerals, plants, human beings and everything which exists or coexists in the world. The other realm is an eternal region of the ideas of all things, not only existing ones but also possible ones. These are exemplars according to which all created things were created. The existing things are cognizable and imitate the intelligible ideas.²⁰ Magni stresses the immensity of the difference between the realm in which we live and the realm of intelligible things. Our world is subject to change, generation and corruption, and everything in the world has its proper location in space and time. On the contrary, the intelligible realm, which Magni calls in concord with St. Augustine and St. Bonaventure "eternal art", is unchangeable, has no spatial and temporal limitation, for it is beyond any place and time.²¹

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¹⁸ Magni (2016) cap. 1, 44: "Imo adjungo, quod tu, ubi revocasti oculum a coelo, introversus nil aliud ex proposito perquirebas, quam veritatem aeternam et incommutabilem." Cf. Bonaventura (1891) I, 2: "intrare ad mentem nostram quae est imago Dei", Augustinus (1962) XXXIX,72, 234: "noli foras ire, in te ipsum redi, in interiore homine habitat veritas."

¹⁹ On two steps of the introspection cf. Stern-Gillet (2007) 145–75.

Magni (2016) cap. 10, 66: "Est, Francisce, duplex regio, quam mente percurras. Una complectitur entia, inter quae nos ipsi computamur: hanc nomino regionem entium existentium. In altera fulgent rationes existentium, quam dico regionem intelligibilium. Illa in unum mundum colligit angelos, coelum, sidera, elementa, mineralia, vegetabilia, bruta, homines et si quae sunt alia ejusmodi, quae hic et nunc existant et coexistant. Haec habet horum omnium, imo et entium possibilium, rationes seu ideas, quibus entia existentia conformantur vel conformari possunt. Entia existentia proprie cognoscuntur. Existentium et possibilium rationes proprie intelliguntur."

²¹ Ibid. cap. 10, 68. "O Francisce, quam magna est regio, quam inhabitat Lux mentium: magna est et non habet finem, excelsa et immensa. Haec regio est illa, unde fulgent rationes, quas imitantur entia, quae hoc mundo hic et nunc existente

For Magni this strict Platonic dualism is the result of introspection. The human mind can come to the difference between the world of existing things and the world of ideas only when it has turned inward. Or in other words, the human mind engaging in introspection must necessarily distinguish the corporeal things, or better to say the intentional representations of corporeal things, from their ideas, which these representations presuppose. For instance in *De Luce mentium* Valeriano speaks about the assessment of corporeal beauty which requires the prior knowledge of perfect beauty, in which all corporeal beauty participates. The image of a beautiful person, which emerges in the mind as a representation of the beautiful person, is compared in the mind with perfect beauty already existing in the mind.²² This passage on beauty can be an allusion to Plotinus' *Ennead* or possibly an echo of Marsilio Ficino's *Commentary on Plato's Symposium*, which could be one of the unacknowledged sources of Magni's philosophy.

On the other hand, introspection is a way to overcome this dualism in a certain sense. While the beings in the existing world are cognizable, the eternal realm is intelligible. To overcome the difference, Magni has to find a connection between cognition and intellection inside the

continentur....Vis scire, quid intersit palatium hoc et artem ejus? Palatium hoc habuit initium essendi. Dum est, est obnoxium mutationi multiplici. Desinet esse. Insuper palatium hoc est in loco unico, determinato et plane definito. At vero ars, in quam respicit omnis ille, qui aedificat palatium, non habuit initium essendi artem ejusmodi. Nulli est obnoxia mutationi. Nunquam desinet esse ars. Insuper non arctatur ad ullum locum. Est enim ars illa ab aeterno, in aeternum, incommutabilis in omni loco et extra omnem locum. Heu, heu, Francisce, quam est immane discrimen illud, quod sejungit regionem, in qua sumus, a regione intelligibilium."

²² Ibid. cap. 6, 54-56. "... si sit censendum de corporali pulchritudine multarum personarum, id fieri nequit citra errorem, nisi praecognoscamus perfectam pulchritudinem, ex qua definimus, quid pulchritudinis participet unaquaeque propositarum personarum ... Petrus vero, cujus pulchritudinem definite volo cognoscere, nil habeat pulchritudinis praeter congruam molem; eam tum definio, cum ex nota perfecta pulchritudine intelligo Petrum ex tribus requisitis unam habere molem congruam ... Vides ergo, ut pulchritudo perfecta non repraesentet aut undequaque assimiletur personis pulchris; sed duntaxat secundum aliquam vel aliquas sui partes: cum interea et imago supponens pro imaginato et ea, cui comparamus rem, cujus est imago, adaequate assimilentur rei; adeo ut imago supponens accipiatur pro re et ea, cui res comparatur, sit velut adaequata idea rei cognoscendae. Perfectum vero si co|gnoscatur, non est per omnia simile imperfectis, et consequenter non affirmatur de illis; sed cognoscenti dat ea cognoscere definiendo, ut dictum est."

human mind, which would correspond to the ontological difference between the realm of existing things and the realm of eternal ideas.

Here Magni comes to the central concept of his philosophy, to the concept of "the light of minds", which he has again borrowed from both St. Augustine and St. Bonaventure. Magni elaborates on the theory of illumination, which was typical for medieval and Renaissance Platonism, by means of ascribing epistemological, ontological and natural-philosophical meaning to light.

To explain the epistemological role of light and the light of minds, Magni draws an analogy between the senses and the intellect. Like corporeal light, which is the precondition of all sensible cognition, the light of minds is the precondition of the human intellect and of intellection. The first part of the analogy, that corporeal light is the precondition of sensible cognition, which seems to be unintuitive, is based on Magni's specific view of the object of sensible cognition. While the object of sense perception are bodies (*corpora*), the object of intellection is being. Then Magni underscores the extension of bodies as their main feature, which resembles Descartes' *res extensa*. Nevertheless, unlike Descartes, Magni thinks that one can have cognition of bodies as such, i.e. of their extension, only by means of sight. The other sense faculties, hearing, taste, smell and touch, do not cognize bodies as such but merely some of their qualities.

Consequently, according to Magni, in sense cognition, light is the precondition of seeing, because bodies are not visible and thus not cognizable, if they are not illuminated by light.²⁵ Without illumination

²⁴ Ibid. cap. 2, 46: "Non tamen lux illuminat sonum, odorem, saporem, calorem, frigiditatem, humiditatem, siccitatem et alia ejusmodi: haec enim non sunt corpora, sed qualitates in corporibus, quae oculis clausis percipi possunt."

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²³ Ibid. cap. 10, 70: "Et quemadmodum lux sensibilis distinguit quaelibet minutiora corpora sub obtutu videntis, sic Lux mentium distinguit omnia ac singula, quae in repraesentato mundo sensibili habent diversam entitatis rationem.... Scias ergo ea omnia, quae quomodolibet illuminantur, distinguuntur seu secernuntur a Luce mentium, pertinere ad regionem entium existentium. Lux vero mentium est ipsissima regio intelligibilium."

²⁵ Ibid.: "Corpora vero qua corpora, si non sint a luce illuminata, sunt invisibilia." Magni follows the medieval Augustinian-Bonaventurian tradition stressing the sensible light as the condition of seeing. Cf. Scarpelli (2007) 65.

by physical light or sensible light (*lux sensibilis*) one would only have knowledge of qualities of bodies and not of bodies as such. ²⁶

Then it is easy for Magni to draw the above mentioned analogy between corporeal light and the light of mind. Mental light is a condition of judgment and definition. Humans can judge or define only in the light of the mind, as its precondition. To support this view Magni creates a thought experiment; he even uses this modern term explicitly (experimentum mentale). He forms the hypothesis that light is emitted from the eyes. Then, if a man were in a cell illuminated by no light, his eyes would emit light illuminating everything in the room. Therefore, Magni concludes, light is a condition of cognition, but is not cognizable as such. The man in the cell whose eyes would emit light would see the cell and the objects inside it but not the light of his eyes. 27

Similarly, in judging and defining one needs mental light as its precondition, which he does not cognize, or at least not directly. Judgement is an activity of the human soul which compares the image of a thing with a similar image, dwelling inside of the mind. Without mental light one could not come to any conclusion, or definition. ²⁸ Judging and defining have a syllogistic form, in which the general proposition is not derived from the senses. Only when someone enters his or her mind, he or she grasps the veracity of these general propositions, such as "every whole is greater than its part". This statement is known by itself. Magni says that it is a "direct per se notum" of intellection.

But there is also another type of per se notum, which Magni calls "reflexive" per se notum, which is graspable only by means of

²⁶ On the meaning of the sense perception in Magni cf. Sousedík (1982) 94–99, Nejeschleba (2017).

²⁷ Magni (2016) cap. 12, 78: "Cogita ergo, Francisce, quid foret, si homo propagaret lumen ex oculis propriis; isque foret constitutus in conclavi, in quo nullum sit lumen praeter illud, quod manat ab oculis hominis illius. Hic suis lucentibus oculis illuminaret conclave et quae in eo continentur: puta parietes, fenestras, januam, mensam, scabella, vasa, libros et alia ejusmodi; quae omnia videret ac discerneret beneficio illius lucis, quam emittit ex propriis oculis: nec tamen is posset eam lucem suis oculis insidentem intueri; sed duntaxat a ea, quae per illam redduntur visibilia."

²⁸ Ibid. cap. 8, 60: "Quoniam vero nulla est perfectio, quae velut ens imperfectum non colligatur sub entitate perfecta: necessario entitas perfecta est Lux mentium, quae dat intelligenti definire omnia entia."

introspection. An example of this may be "I am aware that I know that every whole is greater than its part". ²⁹

Thus, the result of reflexion as part of introspection is self-awareness.³⁰ During the process of cognition the soul becomes an image very similar to the external object, which is the source of the light. Simultaneously the soul itself becomes this light, which is received by the soul. The soul, which has become light, cognizes by means of this light and also comes to cognize its own nature and therefore attains self-awareness. Visual sense cognition leads to the knowledge that the cognizing person existed before the sense cognition.³¹

Self-awareness precedes sense cognition and this is what Magni calls the light of minds. By means of the light of minds we see ideas which enable us to judge and define. The source of ideas is God, dwelling as the light of minds in the human soul, which is his image. The human soul thus cognizes God directly but not absolutely, insofar as God is an example of things which can only be imitated imperfectly. Nevertheless, by means of reflexion one can grasp God as the bare light of minds in eternal intellection, which is hidden in the darkness of our mind. Magni concludes that the light by means of which we see all things has been infused into our mind, but whenever we try to see this light we do not grasp anything. It is not possible to see it directly, as it is not possible for us to see our eyes through our eyes. 33

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²⁹ Magni (1660) III, tr. 9, 8: "Noscuntur autem actu directo vel reflexo. ...Nos cognoscimus et sensu et intellectu. Hinc quattuor differentiae per se notorum, scilicet, primo-nota per sensum, v. g. Sol visus. Primo-nota per intellectum, ut Totum est maius sua parte. Meae sensationes mihi per se notae, v. g. Sum conscius, me videre Solem, sum conscius, me imaginari Solem. Demum meae intellectiones; sum conscius, me intelligere, quod Totum sit maius sua parte."

³⁰ Magni (2016) cap. 20, 122–127. Cf. Sousedík (1982) 94.

³¹ Magni (1660) III, tr. 10, cap. 3, 21: "Animadverto autem, quod ego mutatus de illis tenebris ad illa lumina, non puto, me mutari de mera non entitate ad illam entitatem luminosam; sed sic mutor, conscius, me praeexistere illi illumination." Cf. Blum (1998) 107.

³² Magni (2016) cap. 11, 71-77. Chapter is entitled "Lux mentium posuit tenebras latibulum suum". To the knowledge of God in Magni cf. da Guspini (1960) 264–97; Sousedík (1998) 118–24.

³³ Magni (2016) cap. 12, 78: "Porro menti humanae naturaliter indita est Lux, per quam intelligimus entia omnia; licet cum eam Lucem intueri conamur, nil nobis occurat, quod intelligamus: non tamen sic est nobis impossibile eam Lucem immediate animadvertere, ut nobis est impossibile immediate videre oculis proprios oculos."

This is how Magni's elaboration of medieval Platonism and medieval metaphysics of light follows St. Augustine and St. Bonaventure. As Magni identifies the light of minds, which is the principle of human cognition and intellection, with God the creator as the light of minds, he connects the epistemological and ontological meaning of light. Light as the epistemological principle is simultaneously the ontological principle. Magni justifies his view of God the creator as light identified with the intellect by means of his reading of the beginning of the Gospel according to John, where he interprets the Greek term "logos" not as "verbum" but as "ratio": "In principio erat ratio". ³⁴

Magni later continued to develop metaphysics of light, when he also described light as a fundamental physical principle, influenced by contemporary physics and by his own experiments with the vacuum. Magni's Platonism could be described in greater detail and further Platonic features of Magni's philosophy could be enumerated, such as his use of the metaphor of the Sun in his defence of heliocentrism.

To sum up, Valeriano Magni in his philosophy explicitly follows St. Augustine and St. Bonaventurian medieval Platonism, which he tries to elaborate into a comprehensive system. He adopts the Platonic ontological distinction between the world of existing things and the realm of eternal ideas. Augustinian introspection plays a crucial role in his philosophy, for this distinction can be discovered only when the mind has turned inward and after examining the mental states. The introspection results in self-awareness and in an emphasis on the concept of the light of minds, which is an elaboration of the Augustinian-Bonaventurian metaphysics of light, underscoring the epistemological, ontological, and natural philosophical meaning of light. For these reasons the framework of Valeriano Magni's philosophy can be regarded as Platonic and even Valeriano Magni himself as a late follower of Plato, whom he explicitly assessed as a thinker illuminated by God.

eorum, quae sunt, factum esse." Cf. Bérubé (1984) 129-57.

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³⁴ Ibid. cap. 21, 132: "Hoc doctore intellexi, quod in principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum etc., Jo. c. 1., scilicet, quod ab aeterno erat Ratio; et Ratio erat apud Deum; et Deus erat Ratio; hoc nimirum fuisse ab aeterno apud Deum: omnia per Rationem facta esse et sine ipsa nil

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