

Tomasz Stępień

Remarks on Neoplatonism as a synthesis of ancient thought

Studia Philosophiae Christianae 39/1, 196-209

2003

Artykuł został zdigitalizowany i opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez **Muzeum Historii Polski** w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

and distinct) worked through its own inertia to lead its adherents into positions difficult to reconcile with supernatural faith and especially with revealed truths and, therefore, was gradually conducing to laicization of thinking and reinforcing modern secularism²³.

TOMASZ STĘPIEŃ
Wydział Teologiczny UKSW

REMARKS ON NEOPLATONISM AS A SYNTHESIS OF ANCIENT THOUGHT

PREFACE

As we know, Neoplatonism was the last philosophical system created by ancient pagan philosophers. This system was very attractive to Christian thinkers, who made it a basis for explaining Christian faith. Therefore it became a part of Christian philosophy of Middle Ages. In the same time, when in Europe falling Roman Empire left almost no culture and philosophy in the west, in the eastern lands conquered by Arabs, Greek texts were translated into Arabic, and the dawn of Arabic philosophy began. Writings of Aristotle became the most popular, however Arabic philosophers read those texts in a neoplatonic way, because neoplatonic pagan philosophers considered the thought of Aristotle as a part of their system and interpreted it in a specific way.

All this may seem obvious but at the beginning I would like to show how important Neoplatonism is to understand both Christian and Arabic philosophy. Proper understanding of Neoplatonism is not a simple thing. Last few decades brought a lot of new studies on Neoplatonism, and it becomes clear, that many things must be revised in understanding of neoplatonic thought. Those studies have shown a new vision of the last pagan system. I would like to present only some problems of this vision, which in my opinion are of great importance in studies on medieval Christian and Arabic philosophy.

²³ Cf. L. Kołakowski, *Świadomość religijna i więź kościelna*, 172-174; 176-182; 226.

Before we start to look at some aspects of neoplatonic synthesis itself, there is one thing which must be said. Neoplatonism as a philosophical system appeared in the 3rd century A.D. and almost every book says that its creator was Plotin. But when we look at the philosophy of Plotin from his own point of view, everything will look quite different. In his own eyes Plotin said nothing more than he had heard from his teacher – Ammonius Sakkas. Plotin was 28 years old when he met Ammonius in Alexandria and at once entered his school¹. For 10 years Plotin was one of the best students of Ammonius. When he was 38 years old he left Alexandria to search the wisdom of the East. When he came back to Rome in 244 A.D. he established his own school. His lectures in Rome and his studies were „in the spirit of Ammonius”². The influence of the teacher was so deep that for Plotin only a verbal teaching had any value. With other students of Ammonius, Orygenes and Herenius, he made a promise that he would never write about anything that he heard in Alexandria. Fortunately he did not keep that promise, and in the years 253-269 he wrote 54 treatises³. It is now hard to say which parts of doctrine of *Enneads*⁴ were thoughts of Plotin and what was taken from Ammonius, but Plotin was saying that he had only wrote down what he had heard in Alexandria. It is not all. Plotin, just as almost every of his neoplatonic successors, used to say that they were only discovering true thought of Plato. Plato himself was considered as the greatest philosopher of all times. His writings were the revelation of god’s wisdom. Other Greek thinkers also had some parts of wisdom, but none of them was to compare with Plato. And, therefore, Neoplatonists started to create systems which were a gathering of grains of wisdom of all ancient philosophy. But every grain, every part of wisdom in all philosophy, if it was true, must have been related to Plato, must have been an explanation to some problems analyzed by Plato, or must have been an explanation of reality on a lower level. So in true philosophy there was nothing more to be done but to give a commentary or explanations of Pla-

¹ Porphyre, *Life of Plotinus*, Paris 1982, 3.

² Ibidem.

³ Ibidem, 4-6.

⁴ Porphyre gave an order to those treatises, and grouped them in six *enneads* – six groups of nine treatises in each part.

to, or to combine Plato with all other philosophy. This is the reason why Neoplatonism became a synthesis of ancient thought. There was no need to throw away writings of any writer just because it did not agree with Plato's *Dialogues*. The way to philosophy was to seek links between them.

1. THREE PRINCIPLES OF PLOTIN

The most important problem in understanding Neoplatonism as a synthesis of ancient thought is to recognize the origin of three principles of reality which we can find in his doctrine. Those are: the One (*hen*), Intellect (*nous*) and the Soul (*psyche*). The One is the absolute of Plotin; it stands above all other things. First product of the One is Intellect – the place of intellectual forms of all things below. Third hypostasis – the Soul is the link between intellectual and sensual reality, and it gives to it the power of existence which comes from the One.

1.1. THE ONE

The origin of the concept of the One as the absolute and the highest part of reality is obviously platonic. But the full meaning of Plato's doctrine about the One was discovered lately. In many ancient texts about Plato we can find, that not everything of his teaching was written in *Dialogues* and *Letters*. Those texts say that there was a secret part of his teaching which was never written, and was only transmitted by verbal teaching. Aristotle points out that there were „unwritten doctrines” (*agapha dogmata*)⁵. Giovanni Reale shows in his great work *History of ancient philosophy*, that the most important part of these doctrines concerned exactly the One as the first principle of all things⁶. Fortunately Plato made a small exception and wrote one dialogue about his understanding of the One – *Parmenides* – dialogue which shows many dialectic hypotheses concerning the One⁷. One as the absolute is above the reality of supra sensual forms. All forms are composed of the One – principle of unity, and the Diad – principle of many. Plato understood that each form or idea is composed of two things: the One and ma-

⁵ Aristotle, *Physics*, 2, 209 b 11-17.

⁶ G. Reale, *Historia filozofii starożytniej*, Lublin 1996, vol. II, 29-54 (*Polish edition*).

⁷ *Parmenides*, 135c-166c.

ny, because it is a unity of many things. Because it is supra sensual and immaterial it can be a principle of material and sensual things. Each idea is a principle of some things. Therefore there must be one principle, which is not principle of group of certain things, but is the principle of everything. This principle must be the absolute, because it is the absolute unity of all. To be the absolute unity of all means also to be the first principle of all. This is the simplest way to see the way of Plato's thinking, of how he came to be aware of the One as the first principle. We must notice that in the Ionian philosophy before Plato, to understand reality meant to show one principle which explains everything⁸. Plato is not only showing the one principle but he shows that this one principle is the One. The primary consequence of this way of thinking was that the One was not only one of the ideas. It was not like other ideas it must have been above all of them. To say it in more simple way it is one and only, so it cannot be like the others. It was Plato's doctrine, but Plotin was the man who saw the consequences more precisely. Plato's immaterial forms were able to be principles of reality because they were different. They were above matter. Plotin said more: the One can be the principle of all because it is absolutely different, and above all⁹. It is one but all other things are many. So we can only say that the One is one, nothing more, and even this is too much. The One is not a being and cannot be understood by intellect. This was a simple conclusion of Plato's philosophy, which brought the greatest problem of neoplatonic philosophy. How anything could be a principle if it has nothing in common with any being? The basic rule of metaphysics is that a principle can cause an effect similar to it, but weaker. The effect of the One is many, but the One cannot be many in any aspect. So the One is above all and causes something absolutely different from itself¹⁰. We will return to this problem later in the analysis of procession; here I would like to show, how deep is the link between Plato and Plotin. Plotin in *Enneads* had to face the same problem which was analyzed in Plato's *Parmenides*, and just like Plato he cannot solve it. In my opinion Plotin's merit was understanding of this problem once again and trying to

⁸ G. Reale, op. cit., vol. II, 113.

⁹ *Enneads* V, 3.

¹⁰ E. F. Osborn, *Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria*, Cambridge 1956, 37.

find an explanation. In the 1st and 2nd century A.D. in the writings of many middle Platonists, we can find an opinion that the One is the first principle above all, but Plotin saw deep philosophical consequences of that. I don't need to mention, that it was a problem of all neoplatonic philosophers after Plotin.

We cannot forget that this doctrine has also its roots in the Pythagorean School. For Pythagoras who perceived numbers as principles of reality, one was also first and most important principle. But in the Plato's system the One became a real metaphysical principle of all things. The 1st and 2nd century A.D. was the time of the rebirth of another philosophical school – the school of Pythagoras. Neopythagorean school with its greatest representative – Numenius, also found its place in the neoplatonic system, and become a part of it.

1.2. INTELLECT

The most profound source of the doctrine of Intellect was the philosophy of Anaxagoras. He was the first who said that Intellect (*nous*) was the principle of the order of the world¹¹. As we know today, Anaxagoras did not discover the immaterial nature of it and therefore the true meaning of Intellect as a principle could not be formulated before Plato.

Below the One in Plato's reality was the world of intellectual forms – world of ideas. It might be worth asking, where exactly that world was. In Plato's opinion forms were principles which existed eternally and simply they were. So this question for him could be strange. This becomes a problem to his successors. Normally, we bear supra sensual conceptions of things in our minds, but everybody knows, that we do not have a clear perception of them. We are only getting closer or going away from its true meaning. That is why Plato thought that there had to be a place where justice exists in clear and simple way, and is an ideal justice, just like any other ideas. But when in the 1st century A.D. Philo of Alexandria discovered again that immaterial forms must be something real, after the long period of materialism, he was not speaking of a separate world of ideas, but he placed them in a mind¹². Of course it was not

¹¹ Plato, *Phedon* 97 c.

¹² Philo of Alexandria, *De opificio mundi*, 19.

a human mind – it was the perfect mind. Forms, in the perfect and clear way, are in the perfect mind. Speaking more precisely, they are in reason, which he called *Logos*. So in our imperfect reasons there are imperfect understandings of things, which are in the perfect way in the perfect *Logos*¹³. This doctrine of Philo was developed by his successors in the 1st, 2nd, and at the beginning of the 3rd century A. D. It was also the time when the writings of Aristotle were rediscovered and new disciples of peripatetic school arose. As we know, the absolute of Aristotle was not the One, but the Intellect. This Intellect was a self thinking thought and the effective cause of all. In the middle Platonism, as well as in Neoplatonism, there was a conviction, that Aristotle in his writings described the lower level of reality. So Aristotle was not able to understand what is the nature of absolute. Therefore the place of the Aristotelian absolute was below the One. There was another argument concerning that problem. The basic operation of intellect was to contemplate. But what an intellect was to contemplate when it was the absolute? Of course he cannot think or contemplate anything other than himself. But if he contemplates himself he is not able to be himself. He becomes the object and the subject of contemplation, so he becomes two, not one¹⁴. If he cannot be totally himself, he is not able to be the absolute. Here we can see why Intellect must be below the One and we see the way the procession of Intellect was explained. It was indeed an explanation of Plotin. In the middle Platonism, *Logos* was identified with Intellect, but Plotin add to this an explanation how the One becomes an Intellect. We will see more precisely this process later, but now let us take a closer look at the Intellect itself. Intellect is not absolute unity, so it can be the unity of being, of life and of reason. Firstly, it is the unity of being, everything which exists below. Between all things there are some which are alive, and so in the second place Intellect is the unity of all living things, and then it is the unity of reason, of all thinking things¹⁵. Here we have the origin of the first triad, and this principal distinction lead in later Neoplatonism to understanding the Intellect as the whole world of intellectual things (*kosmos noeti-*

¹³ Ibidem, 24.

¹⁴ *Enneads* VI, 2.

¹⁵ *Enneads* VI, 6.

kos)¹⁶. In the last neoplatonic systems of Jamblichus or Proklos there was a huge number of intellectual beings in hierarchies of enneads and triads. Intellectual forms are not only thoughts of perfect mind, but are living and separate beings. But at the top of the intellectual world there is always the first intellect which includes them in primal unity¹⁷.

In this analysis we can see how the world of ideas of Plato becomes a perfect Intellect, and we see another source of neoplatonic synthesis.

1.3. THE SOUL

The Plotinian conception of the Soul was threefold, because the Soul is far from the One it approaches many. Firstly, the Soul is the unity of all souls; it is the highest part of the third hypostasis¹⁸. Secondly, the Soul is a soul of material world, and on the third level we can find all the individual souls of humans¹⁹. The origin of the conception of the Soul refers probably to Stoics. In their system the Soul was an accumulation of all active matter of the universe. The whole world for them was material, but it was alive as well. In Greek mentality everything which was alive must have had a soul. All planets are moving in a certain order, seasons are changing in the same way every year. So there must be something, which brings all these things to life, and gives them an order. In the Stoicism the Soul was also called *Logos* and reason. They agree that whatever gives an order must be a reason²⁰. This argument refers us to ethic of this school. Reason gives order but emotions bring disorder. So if one wants to live according to the nature, he must live in the harmony of reason and throw away all emotions. Human souls, just like the Soul of the world, were also considered as material things. They were concentrations of the active part of material reality. The Soul was identified with the universe and human souls were nothing more than small parts of it²¹. Plotin rejected an opinion that a soul is material, but he did not reject conception of the Soul. Its

¹⁶ G. Reale, op. cit., vol. IV, 535-538.

¹⁷ *Enneads* VI, 7.

¹⁸ *Enneads* IV, 1, 1.

¹⁹ *Enneads* IV, 4, 4.

²⁰ Cicero, *De natura deorum*, III, 39.

²¹ G. Reale, op. cit., vol. II, 387.

role was the same, but immaterial character better explained its role. The Soul was the link of two realities: material, and immaterial²². It imaged the perfect order of immaterial world to the material world. Of course matter means many, and therefore it could not be a perfect image. But the role of the Soul was not only in efforts of giving order. The Soul was giving to matter the power of existence too²³. It is a brand new concept in Greek thinking. Even Plato and Aristotle concerned matter as the second principle. There was a big gap between material and immaterial world, and now that gap was overcome. The One must be the first principle of the universe, it must explain all. So the power of existence of matter must come from the One. The Soul become that important link between the two worlds.

So once again a part of non platonic, but Greek philosophy adjusted to a new system found its place in a neoplatonic system. Now we see that this perception of the world is a synthesis of Greek vision of the world. Platonic One, as the first principle modified by middle Platonists and Neopythagoreans, perfected by Plotin. Conception of Intellect, as a synthesis of the Platonic world of ideas, and a perfect Intellect of middle Platonists. And at the lowest part – the Soul – modified and perfected idea of Stoics.

2. PROCESSION

It is not difficult to see, that basic parts of neoplatonic world were taken from earlier philosophy and accommodated to the new system. But almost every author who writes about Neoplatonism stresses that there is at least one new neoplatonic conception – the conception of procession. The One is producing all things in a process, which can also be called *emanation*. It is one of the most impressive theories of how the universe comes into being. Plato's explanations about ideas as a mix of two principles The One and the Diad are not sufficient. The highest principles of Plato are only intellectual forms, they are not alive. The situation is the same with the ideas. They simply cannot be alive, because one of the most important features of the principles is their invariability. Intellectual forms cannot change, because if, for example, the One changed in

²² *Enneads* IV, 8.

²³ *Enneads* IV, 6.

any way it could not be able to be the One any more. This problem was clear to Plato, and it was clear, that unchangeable and unmoving idea of the One cannot create other ideas²⁴. What follows, ideas cannot create the material world. It is not enough to have a model to create something. There must be a power to form the matter according to a model. There is a necessity to put into this system other force, someone who lives and can operate, and can compose matter as a reflection of immaterial forms. This force was called Demiurge. Demiurge is not the form himself, and therefore he can create, or rather build, material beings watching the ideas.

This problem was solved by Plotin in another way. The Plotinian One is alive²⁵. But its life is completely different from our imaginings about what it means to be alive. In the material world we have various levels of living things. Plants are hardly alive, because they can only vegetate. Animals are more perfect because they have sensual cognition. Humans live in the most advanced way, because they have intellectual cognition. So the way of life is more perfect if the cognition is more perfect. The One, as the absolute must live in the most perfect way, and this means that it must think in the most perfect way. Our thinking is imperfect and it always stays in our mind. If we think about building a new house it is only a thought. The situation is opposite with Platonic Demiurge; he was only a craftsman not an architect. When the One is thinking it is creating. The One starts to think of itself and it is the beginning of everything. In the highest levels of reality thinking as creation is something so perfect, that it cannot stay in mind and it becomes reality. This process is started by the One, but it continues at the level of Intellect and the Soul, in a less perfect way.

So we see that that a completely new idea of emanation is an answer to an old problem. In Greek philosophy we can find a perception of reality as a process. In natural systems of Ionian philosophers there was very often a conception of the world as a process. Second known philosopher – Anaxymander taught about the world which is emerging from the infinite principle (*apeiron*), by creating borders between opposite elements. Later we can find a lot of examples of processes in the material world, but what is intere-

²⁴ Plato, *Sophist*, 248 a.

²⁵ E. Gilson, *Byt i istota*, transl. from Fr. by P. Lubicz, J. Nowak, Warszawa 1963, 35.

sting, very early it appears a conviction, that there must be something which systematizes the development of the world. Heraclite was saying that the war between opposite things was the mother of the universe. His world was in instant movement, all was flowing, and only one thing was certain: everything is changing (*panta rei*)²⁶. But in this war there is an order and it is given by reason (*logos*). *Logos* is perceived as fire and as the principle of all. I have mentioned *Logos* before concerning elements of Plotinian universe, but here I would like to show another aspect. *Logos* as fire is a part of the world. The operation of *Logos* is to think. So the *Logos* is burning everything, and changing everything, which is similar to creating an order. In the philosophy of Heraclite it is not clearly visible, but we can show it better in the system of Stoics which refers to Heraclite. *Logos* is in everything, because it is a sum of all active mater. It brings life to the universe as a soul. Life, as we know, means thinking. So life of everything is nothing more than the thinking of *Logos*. This is just what I would like to show, that in Greek philosophy the conception of thinking as creating was present and developed. It is worth to mention one more thinker – Anaxagoras, who developed this idea probably to the most advanced position. Of course he was a materialist but his understanding of the Intellect which is creating all things is very close to a conviction that true Intellect is of immaterial nature, and that thinking is an immaterial process.

Conception of procession (or emanation) as the process of creation is then present in Greek philosophy before Plotin. His primary merit was to join Plato's discovery of immaterial nature of thinking with a materialist idea of thinking of the absolute as creation. Of course Plotinian description of the process of thinking is much more complicated. He adds to it a contemplation which we can call passive thinking. The procession then is threefold. The One first stays in itself in its perfection. Then it starts to think about itself and becomes two – the subject and the object of thinking²⁷. This is active thinking in which Intellect is emerging from the One. But this Intellect is unformatted and indefinite, so it turns back to the One in contemplation. And when he intellectually sees the One in

²⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 5, 1010 a.

²⁷ *Enneads* V, 6.

a passive thinking he become fully formatted Intellect²⁸. This three-fold process has its continuation on the level of Intellect and on the level of the Soul. At the end the Soul creates matter. Finally matter cannot create anything because it cannot think itself.

This process is not only present in the universe as a whole. It is a process which exists in a human soul too. When we are trying to understand something we are imitating universal process in an imperfect way. We can see it better in writings of later Latin philosopher of the 4th c. A. D. – Marius Victorinus. First, the Soul exists in itself which is described as to be (*esse*). Then the Soul is doing its act of living which is thinking of something unidentified and unformatted (*vivere*). Finally the thought is coming back to the Soul like an apprehension of the object. The Soul starts to understand the thing about which it was thinking (*intelligere*)²⁹. Therefore this new understanding of the process of the universe is a new understanding of a human soul. This leads us to a new remark of our deliberation.

3. PHILOSOPHY AS THE WAY OF LIFE

What is the goal of philosophy? Why did thousands of men of Greek and Roman period write so many works about philosophy? Why did Plotin create his system and tried to unite these different philosophies in one system? The most popular answer to those questions is that man is simply curious. As Aristotle says in a first chapter of *Methaphisics*, all men are striving for knowledge, because they want to understand the world³⁰. So the primary goal of philosophy is to know the truth about the world. This explanation we can find in almost every book. But it is not all. Man not only wants to know and understand. This knowledge gives man an opportunity to live better and to reach in a better way the goal of his life. So philosophy is not only theoretical knowledge even if it is knowledge about principles of the behavior which is ethic, as a part of philosophy. The same Aristotle writes that a men who, by studying philosophy, knows how to live a life and doesn't act according to that knowledge, is like a patient who has heard what doctor said but is

²⁸ *Enneads* V, 2.

²⁹ Marius Victorinus, *Adversus Arium*, III, 5, 1.

³⁰ Aristotle, *Methaphisics*, A 1, 980 a – 982 a.

doing nothing to recover³¹. This way of behavior leads to death. Of course philosopher is not living according to philosophy under a treat of death. Yet all ethical tips and principles have one goal: to lead a man to happiness. If he doesn't do what he recognizes he will be unhappy in a double way. Firstly, because he did not become happy and secondly, because he knew what to do but he wasted this knowledge. So philosophy for ancient philosophers was not only theoretical knowledge but it was a way of life. This primal truth is included even in a term „philosopher” which means the lover of wisdom. In an anecdote about Pythagoras³² who, according to tradition, was a creator of that term, we can find that a philosopher was a man who was trying to achieve wisdom, and philosophy was an effort to reach wisdom. A philosopher was loving wisdom, because he could not have it. Wisdom itself was something divine, and only gods were able to have it. Man was only able to be a seeker of wisdom. So a man who was seeking wisdom was trying to be similar to God. Being similar to God meant to be united with Him as strong as it was possible for human being. And the way to unification was the way to happiness. So in later definitions of philosophy we can find that philosophy was to imitate God³³. All ancient philosophy had this meaning in itself. Philosophy always was perceived as a way of life. It is clear when we look at the schools of the Hellenistic period. They thought, that philosophy must be changed, because great systems of Plato and Aristotle brought too many theoretical problems which are not worth solving. They wanted to live happily, not in idle discussions, but according to simple rules like epicurean: seize the day. But finally they failed because those idle discussions sometime can be fruitful. If you want to be happy you must first think what it mean to be happy. If happiness is a unity with God you must first know who God is.

Neoplatonism made a progress in answering this question. Platonic One which was only the highest principle becomes for Neoplatonists a living God. If the One is God, to be a philosopher meant to try to be like the One. As we know the One was not only a principle present in the immaterial reality which cannot be re-

³¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II 3, 1105 b.

³² Cicero, *Tusculian dissertations*, V, 3, 7-9.

³³ J. Domański, *Metamorfozy pojęcia filozofii*, Warszawa 1996, 7.

ached. For Neoplatonists the One was present in the human soul. But the Soul is immersed in the material world of many. So philosophy is a road to immaterial reality. Here we are close to the mystical aspect of Neoplatonism. Philosophy slowly becomes mystics. But when philosophy is the way to the absolute and the absolute is so precisely described, what else can happen? I don't want here to estimate whether neoplatonic conception of life and the absolute was correct, but once again I would like to show that Neoplatonism fulfilled the Greek understanding of philosophy as the way of life.

CONCLUSION

In my opinion those three problems: the elements of the world, procession, and philosophy as the way of life show in the best way Neoplatonism as a synthesis of ancient thought. Neoplatonism was developing in hard conditions, in Roman Empire which was Christian from 314 A.D. Plotin himself did not know Christian faith, and Christianity did not have any influence on creating first neoplatonic system. Yet almost every pagan successor of Plotin wrote a treatise against Christians, who were taking neoplatonic philosophy and tried to accommodate philosophy to explain their dogmas. So neoplatonic schools of IV and V Century were occupied with saving the pagan philosophy which, day by day, was becoming a part of Christian faith. They were not searching for truth but rather arguing that Greek philosophy must be pagan. So the last act of neoplatonic systems was to combine philosophy and religion. Each level of reality was identified with one of gods from the pantheon, and there were a large number of them. Late neoplatonic hierarchy was a combination of various triads and enneads of gods. In my opinion there was no philosophical reason to multiply levels of reality to that degree. But as we see there were religious arguments. Writings of the last neoplatonic philosophers from the 5th and beginning of the 6th century A.D. became very difficult and hard to understand. Not only religion was taken as a part of those last visions of the world. Even poetry of Homer, explained in an allegoric way, found its place in this pattern. And because of that, philosophy was philosophy no more. It was no longer searching for truth about the world and a universal way of good life. It was an end of Greek philosophy, because this was against primary goals which were aimed at by first philosophers. And we can say that hi-

story made a circle. The first philosopher – Tales started philosophical thinking by not giving religious answers to natural questions. He showed that humans can understand this world more or less. So when the last pagan neoplatonic philosophers gave religious answers to natural questions it had to be an end of philosophy. But this was only an anticipation of what was to be done by Christian and Arabic philosophers who, at the beginning of the Middle Ages, came to face the same questions.

ARTUR ANDRZEJUK
Institut Filozofii UKSW

AVICENNE ET THOMAS D'AQUIN.
LES SOURCES ARABES DE LA CONCEPTION
EXISTENTIELLE DE L'ÊTRE

Étienne Gilson dans son extraordinaire livre „L'être et l'essence” a dit: „dans l'histoire du problème de l'existence le nom d'Avicenne évoque immédiatement à l'esprit un prédécesseur de saint Thomas d'Aquin”¹.

Mais les historiens de la philosophie médiévale prennent des positions différentes vis-à-vis des thèses de la philosophie d'Avicenne ainsi que de l'influence de cette philosophie sur la métaphysique de Thomas d'Aquin. Il nous paraît donc intéressant de présenter les opinions des chercheurs sur ces problèmes et d'examiner du plus près comment Thomas d'Aquin a profité des conceptions d'Avicenne dans son premier texte important, intitulée „L'être et l'essence” (*De ente et essentia*).

1. QUELS SONT LES PRINCIPAUX PROBLÈMES COMPRIS DANS
LA PHILOSOPHIE D'AVICENNE?

M. Chahin démontre que „la philosophie d'Avicenne (...) est une philosophie originellement arabe, influencée, bien entendu, par des tendances: aristotélicienne, néoplatonicienne et islamique”².

¹ E. Gilson, *L'être et l'essence*, Paris 2000, 124.

² M. Chahin, *Ontologie et théologie chez Avicenne*, Paris 1962, 11.