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Biblical Exegesis and Aristotelian Naturalism: Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and the animals of the Book of Job

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Abstract. This essay examines the biblical discourse on animals in Job 38-41, as interpreted by Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas in their 13th-century biblical commentaries. In God's first reply to Job (chapters 38 and 39) twelve species of animals are introduced and realistically described, including accurate details of their behavior. Subsequently, chapters 40 and 41 introduce two more complex animals, Behemoth and Leviathan, in which realistic and symbolic features intertwine. This peculiarity of the book of Job – long sequences dedicated to descriptions of animals – allows to investigate *to what extent* and *how* the availability of Aristotelian zoology, whose study was prescribed in the Dominican program promoted and practiced by Albert himself, became an instrument for a renewed biblical exegesis, different from the allegorical and theological moralizing hitherto prevailing in the Christian tradition of commentaries on Job.

Keywords. Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Book of Job, animals in the Bible, Aristotle, Avicenna, biblical exegesis.

The final chapters of the Book of Job contain one of the most impressive biblical theophanies. God speaks out of a whirlwind to make Job aware of the limits of human understanding, an awareness this man totally lacked when demanding an answer from God as to why he suffered in ways he deemed unjust. To this end, God describes natural phenomena from a completely non-anthropocentric angle, taking several examples from the animal world – glimpses of the providential government on activities that are unfamiliar if not dangerous to us, such as providing prey for the lioness or corpses for the vulture to feed upon.

This essay will mainly focus on the biblical discourse on animals in Job 38-41, as interpreted by Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas in their 13th-century biblical commentaries. There are good reasons for choosing these chapters. Usually, biblical references to *real*

animals are extremely laconic and sketchy. Deeply different is what one finds in chapters 38 and 39 of the Book of Job. Here, in God's first reply to Job's tearful questioning about the meaning of his trial, twelve species of animals are introduced and realistically described, including accurate details of their behavior. Subsequently, chapters 40 and 41 introduce two more complex animals, Behemoth and Leviathan, in which realistic and symbolic features intertwine. This peculiarity of the book of Job—long sequences dedicated to descriptions of animals—allows to investigate *to what extent* and *how* the availability of Aristotelian zoology, whose study was prescribed in the Dominican program promoted and practiced by Albert himself, became an instrument for a renewed biblical exegesis, different from the allegorical and theological moralizing hitherto prevailing in the Christian tradition of commentaries on Job.

1. THE BOOK OF JOB IN LATIN MEDIEVAL EXEGESIS

Other commentaries were written during the patristic period (Steinhauser [2016]: 34-70), but, from the last decade of the 6th century onwards, medieval Latin exegesis of the book of Job was dominated by Gregory the Great's voluminous *Moralia in Iob*, a forest of allegorical interpretations where the sufferings of Job, a model of perseverance in affliction and patience rewarded, are understood as foreshadowing the sufferings of Christ and stages of a path to Christian perfection (Straw [2016]: 71-100). In line with Origen's hyperallegorism, Gregory turns every descriptive feature of the biblical page into encrypted references to moral, spiritual and ecclesial life. This also applies to animals (Hesbert [1986]; Cremascoli [2001]: 80-92). The rooster, whose timely singing is mentioned at Job 38:36, becomes the image of the preacher who, in the darkness of worldly life, announces future light and discerns the hours of the night, i.e. sins. The lioness, to which divine providence provides the prey to nourish her hungry cubs, is a metaphor of the

evangelization through which God, «to increase this Church, has drawn innumerable pagans from their world, fulfilling with such purchase of souls the ardent expectations of the apostles» (*Moralia*, XXX, vii, 25)¹. The ravens, to which divine providence generously gives food, represent «the pagan world blackened by sins» («peccatis nigra gentilitas»); the wandering of the young ravens exasperated by hunger is the image of the incessant traveling of preachers in search of souls to be saved. Under the image of the ravens, Gregory adds, it is also possible to understand the Jewish people, black for the demerit of not believing, while «the little ones crying and shaking for hunger» can mean the apostles: with their announcement they desperately seek the conversion of the stock that generated them (XXX, ix, 32).

Throughout the High Middle Ages and beyond, Gregory's hyperallegorical reading of the Book of Job became *the* model for epitomizations and derivative commentaries². Suffice it to say that, in the first half of the 13th century, the Dominican Hugh of Saint-Cher (1200 ca.-1263) was still offering an updated version of that model. In his *Postillae* on the book of Job, once again the rooster and the timing of his singing are identified with the preacher and the phases of preaching³. The following Joban animals, too, are transfigured in the spirit of the Gregorian tradition (albeit not always in the same way): the lioness hunting for preys and her cubs lurking are the strategies for evangelization, to bring new faithful to the Church; the food provided for the raven is the tolerance to the Jews, to whom the bread of preaching is offered; wild goats living in rocky areas are the spiritual masters who dwell within the doctrine of the Fathers of the Church; the laborious calving of the hinds is assimilated

¹ All translations from Latin in this article are mine (except where otherwise indicated).

² For an overall picture, see Seow (2013): 201-207; see also Arnaldi (2004); Carnevale (2010), Clines (2011), and Seow (2012). The classic studies by René Wasselynck (1962), (1964), and (1965) are still highly valuable.

³ *Biblia cum postillis* (= Hugo de Santo Caro [1498]): fol. tt 5 v a-b.

to the doctors of the Church «who, by preaching, bring forth children [in faith] in great pain and sorrow»; the freedom of the wild ass is likened to the contemplative life of the hermits; the yoke to which Job cannot submit the wild ox to force him to plow is «the discipline of morals and faith», while «plowing is preaching»; and so on, with a “Gregorian” radical lack of interest for a possible realistic meaning of this biblical discourse on animals.

2. 13TH CENTURY DOMINICANS ON JOB: EXPONERE AD LITTERAM (ADIUVANTE ARISTOTELE)

This hyperallegorical way of understanding the book of Job finally gave way to an alternative in the second half of the 13th century, when Thomas Aquinas and Albert the Great wrote their programmatically *ad litteram* commentaries on Job⁴.

According to most scholars, Thomas composed his commentary in 1261-64, at Orvieto (Dondaine [1965]: 17*-18*; Yocum [2005]: 22)⁵. As for Albert, scholars have proposed three (hypothetical) periods of composition: (a) more or less the same period as that of Thomas, given the many references to Albert’s own *De vegetabilibus* (1256 ca.) and *De animalibus libri XXVI*, composed between 1258 and 1262⁶; (b) 1264-68, within the «Phase der intensiven Bibelkommentierung» (Anzulewicz [2011]: 30); (c) the different explicit of two manuscripts suggest a later date,

⁴ Cf. Smalley (1952²): 292-328; Dondaine (1965): 25*-26*; Seow (2012): 381.

⁵ Indeed, there are strong parallelisms between the treatment of Providence in the commentary on Job and in the third book of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, that Aquinas was composing in Orvieto in the same period: see Torrell (1996): 115 and 120.

⁶ The critical editor Melchior Weiss points out that the indication «anno MCCLXXIV in Colonia» (in itself not implausible since Albert was living in Cologne at that time) is found only on a *codex descriptus*, but not on its archetype. According to Weiss (1904: x), it is more likely that Albert wrote it shortly after finishing his commentary on Luke in 1261.

1272-4, in the final period of his life, when Albert revised his biblical commentaries⁷.

The change of cultural atmosphere is evident at first sight. No longer a double for the preacher and his preaching, the rooster with its timely singing is, for Thomas and Albert, a plain reference to the estimative power in animals, as opposed to the cogitative faculty to be found «in visceribus hominis»⁸; the lioness hunting for preys, rather than being a metaphor of evangelization, for Albert is simply a *natural* instance of concupiscible and irascible appetites in animals⁹; the providentially nourished hungry ravens, far from being a metaphorical stand-in for the heathens or the Jews, are for Albert just an example of «the relationship between the appetite in animals and the appetible object bestowed by the divine providence»¹⁰ (or, in Thomas’s words, an example of how «each natural thing in its desire, for the very fact that desires some good, almost intends to acquire something from God, who is the author of all goods»¹¹); the laborious calving of the hinds, released from previous reckless assimilations with preaching, is now explained by Albert in purely biological terms that are reminiscent of Aristotle’s treatises on animals and of Albert’s own *De animalibus*¹².

These cursory examples may give an idea of Thomas’s and Albert’s dialogue with Aristotle’s philosophy of mind and of nature. But innovation

⁷ Relying on information already present in Weiss (1904: x) and Dondaine (1965: 7*), Weisheipl (1980: 42) advocates late chronology: 1272 (as in the the explicit of the ms. Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense 445) or 1274 (as in ms. Munich Univ. M 50). On the same wavelength, Anzulewicz (2011) writes that the commentary, possibly begun in the years 1264-1269, was «vollendet 1272 oder 1274». But the discrepancy of dates in the two explicit is—at least—suspicious. Both could simply refer to the final revision of a work substantially written years before.

⁸ Thomas de Aquino, *Expositio super Iob ad litteram*, 206, 612-207, 641; Albertus Magnus, *Commentarii in Iob*, 454, 45-455, 28.

⁹ Albertus Magnus, *Commentarii in Iob*, 456, 23-34.

¹⁰ *Ivi*, 457, 5-21.

¹¹ Thomas de Aquino, *Expositio super Iob*, 207, 695-698.

¹² Albertus Magnus, *Commentarii in Iob*, 458, 6-459, 9.

is to be found at a number of levels, that can be summarized as follows: (i) recourse to Aristotelian philosophy and, more generally, to the sources of university culture; (ii) focus on the realistic traits of the biblical text (and, conversely, drastic reduction of allegorism); (iii) attention paid to the literary structure of the biblical book and its argumentative consistency; (iv) global theological interpretation of the Book of Job in a Maimonidean key, i.e. as a reflection on divine providence.

In the tradition of Gregorian exegesis, up to Hugh of Saint-Cher, the biblical page is constantly being destructured. Each *res* named in the text immediately becomes a *signum*, the subject for polysemic interpretations (often endowed with contradictory meanings). The literal consistency of the biblical text is largely neglected to the benefit of a myriad of spiritual analogies that swarm around each verse. In contrast, in Albert's and Thomas's commentaries, *exponere ad litteram* does not mean just to opt for descriptive realism but also to pay attention to the literary structures of the book and, consequently, of the sequences under scrutiny. The shift towards realism in their analyses of particular verses always finds a place within the recognition of a coherent literary framework, understood by the two Dominicans through macrostructures compatible with scholastic philosophy. In general, for both doctors, in analogy to what happened in a 13th-century *quaestio disputata*, God's speech can be thought of as a *determinatio* that resolves the inconsistencies and contradictions of the *rationes* worded by Job's so-called "friends"¹³.

¹³ Albertus Magnus, *Commentarii in Iob*, 440, 24: «Hanc autem disputationem solus Deus determinare potest, et ideo inducitur ut determinans eam»; 34-35: «Determinat autem pro beato Iob et contra amicos». Thomas de Aquino, *Expositio super Iob*, 199, 2-8: «Praemissa disputatione Iob et amicorum eius de providentia divina, Eliud sibi vices determinantis assumpserat [...]; sed quia humana sapientia non sufficit ad veritatem divinae providentiae comprehendendam, necessarium fuit ut praedicta disputatio divina auctoritate determinaretur»; 13-17: «Dominus, tamquam quaestionis determinator, et amicos Iob redarguit de hoc quod non recte sentiebant, et ipsum Iob de inordinato

Furthermore, both Dominicans articulate God's speech on animals of the section 38:36-39:40 into a coherent sequence of four thematic blocks: (i) cognitive processes; (ii) nutrition and appetites; (iii) generation; (iv) animal behavior. In the next chapter I will come back on this at length.

Finally, behind the exegesis of both Dominicans one can perceive the blueprint of Moses Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*. The theological shift (from the exhortation to patience during trials, typical of Gregorian tradition, to that of the suffering of the just as a challenge to every model of divine providence) is patently indebted with Maimonides' reflection on Job in *Guide*, III, 22-23¹⁴.

3. THE ANIMALS OF JOB 38-39 AS PHILOSOPHICAL ZOOLOGY IN OUTLINE

The biblical sequence on animals in Job 38:36-39:30 presents six pairs of animals, highlighting a common character for each pair: the seeming rationality of the ibis and rooster, the insatiable appetite of the lion and raven, the reproduction, safe from prying eyes, of wild goats and hinds, the indomitable freedom of the wild ass and wild ox, the speed and irrational courage of the ostrich and horse, the orientation ability of the hawk and vulture. Twelve animal species, almost all wild, all suspicious if not hostile to man, accustomed to living in difficult places and, certainly, inaccessible to us: dens, bushes, deserts, salt lands, impervious mountains. Who, if not God, cares for them in a providential way, giving each species the appropriate instincts for survival¹⁵?

modo loquendi, et Eliud de inconvenienti determinatione»; 54-55: «exclusa determinatione Eliud dominus ipse incipit determinare disputationem». On the differences between Thomas and Albert in bringing the biblical book within the scheme of a *quaestio disputata* see Jutras (1955); Smalley, (1952²): 302; Chardonnens (1997): 205-219.

¹⁴ On Aquinas see: Dondaine (1965): 26*-28*; Smalley (1952²): 302; Dubois (1988): 51-53; Vijgen (2007) and (2015): 291-296. On Albert see: Meyer (2016): 201-24.

¹⁵ Some traits of this analysis are patterned on Perdue (1991): 214-215. Furthermore, since the studies of Gerard

For Aquinas, this sequence is articulated into four themes:

(i) cognition (*vis cognoscitiva*): illustrated by the comparison between human wisdom and the intelligence of the rooster (38:36);

(ii) nutrition (*vis nutritiva*): exemplified by feeding the young lions and the ravens (38:39-41);

(iii) generation (*vis generativa*): discussed through the case of the calving of mountain goats and hinds (39:1-4);

(iv) ways of life (*conversatio vitae*), divided into two main sections: (a) behavior of wild versions of domestic animals, such as the onager (or wild ass) and the rhinoceros (taken as a wild version of the ox that serves man for plowing) (39:5-12); (b) description of animals that differ from other animals either because taxonomically ambiguous, such as the ostrich (halfway between birds and land beasts) or because of other salient properties, such as the horse (that stands out for nobleness, pride for its own mane, spectacular jumping, and courage in battles) and, among flying animals, the remarkable navigational abilities of hawk (*accipiter*) and eagle (*aquila*) (39:13-30).

In Albert, too, the Joban sequence is reframed within the conceptual steps of a philosopher of mind and nature. In chapter 38, after a first sequence devoted to the providential divine government in creation (vv. 1-35), verse 36 opens the treatment on the action of divine providence in the *propagatio naturae*, i.e. Providence *qua* irradiated in the secondary causes at work in the processes of the living. This second sequence is articulated into four moments:

(i) *apprehensio intellectiva/sensibilis*: intellectual apprehension in human cogitative faculty and sensible apprehension in the estimative power of animals: 38:36-38;

(ii) *motus sive appetitus*: the faculties of the motive part, or animal appetite, in the irascible and

concupiscible faculties (vv. 39-40) and the providential government of animal appetite (v. 41);

(iii) *generatio* (39:1-4): exemplified with the little-known cases of the calving of mountain goats and the hind;

(iv) Providence and animal behavior (*consuetudo/mores animalium*) (39:5-30), in five parts: (iv.1) animals that cannot be domesticated for their innate love of freedom, such as the wild ass (39:5-8); (iv.2) animals that cannot be tamed because they are particularly strong and disdain submission, such as the wild ox (39:9-12); (iv.3) the ostrich, a taxonomically mixed animal, since both capable of walking (*gressibile*) and flying (*volatile*) (39:13-18); (iv.4) the horse, the noblest domesticated animal (39:19-25); (iv.5) the hawk and the eagle (39:26-30)¹⁶.

These are the macrostructures into which Thomas and Albert articulate the biblical discourse. The time has come to analyze, within these blocks, how their innovative biblical exegesis works when dealing with naturalistic details. Most of the animals recalled in Job 38:36-39:4 are elusive, little known, and, in any case, far from the human world. Their role, in the economy of God's first speech from the whirlwind, is to make Job aware that divine providence rules a myriad of natural processes outside our competence and ability to judge. For instance, verses 39:1-4 take the example of the wild mountain goat (or ibex) and the hind (or female deer): Job has little or no knowledge of times and modes of their gestation and calving, it is not Job but God that guards and protects such natural processes.

When facing the verses on mountain goats (*ibices*), i.e. «Do you know the time the mountain goats give birth among the rocks?», Aquinas

Von Rad (1960), it has been remarked that the naturalistic sequence of Job 38-39 seems to be modeled on the "catalogs of things" of Egyptian sapiential literature, also designed to make the learner aware of the human limit: cf. the chapter *Job and catalogue literature* in Hoffman (1996): 84-114.

¹⁶ By resorting to loose zoological macro-taxonomical criteria, Albert further divides the content of this second block (Job 39) into two groups: (a) land animals (vv. 1-25), in turn divided into: (a.1) wild animals (*silvestres*): mountain goats, hind, wild ass, wild ox, ostrich (vv. 1-18); and (a.2) the noblest domesticated animal, the horse (vv. 19-25); (b) birds of prey such as the hawk (*accipiter*) and eagle (*aquila*), «two types of birds more perfect [...] than others» (vv. 26-30).

merely appends minimal glosses (they «are animals small in body, living in rocky places, where they also calve») and goes straight to the point: modes and times of their gestation and calving are «unknown to men because of the harshness of the places where they calve»; God himself «gives them a natural instinct to know what they have to know about such things»¹⁷.

Albert, instead, focuses on two points:

(a) First, he underscores that all verbs of God's questions in 39:1-2 («Do you *know* the time...?», «Do you *observe* ...?», «Do you *count* the months ...?») have a causative value that marks the difference between God's creative and providential outlook on reality and Job's attempts to understand it: *noti* «refers to active knowledge (*notitia activa*), the one that, while knows being, also produces it, as divine providence does»; *observasti* «means to watch by the active observation (*observatione activa*) that rules their impregnation and calving»; *dinumerasti* «means: did you make them numerable? (*dinumerabilesque fecisti?*) Did you give them their number?» What Job can hope to understand is not even a shadow of God's *notitia activa* or *observatio activa*, i.e. a divine mental act that produces the being of what is known («*quae facit esse quod noscit*») ¹⁸. Thusly, Albert concludes, «God set the laws of conception and impregnation without looking at what is produced in time (*non ad aliquid temporale respiciens*), so that man and his works have no part in it»¹⁹.

(b) Second, and contrary to God's teaching to Job, Albert is eager to spell out these phenomena and to expand on biological and zoological details. He explains that «tempus partus» (time of bringing forth) «is to be understood as the lapse that goes from the initial conception to complete birth, i.e. what Aristotle calls impregnation time»²⁰.

¹⁷ Thomas de Aquino, *Expositio super Iob*, 208, 9-16 and 22-26.

¹⁸ Albertus Magnus, *Commentarii in Iob*, 458, 9-12; 27-30; 35-39.

¹⁹ *Ivi*, 458, 24-27.

²⁰ *Ivi*, 12-15: «tempus autem intelligitur quod est inter primum conceptum usque ad partum completum, quod apud Aristotelem vocatur tempus impraegnationis».

What most strikes here is that, before a Biblical text suggesting that no man can grasp the complexities of certain natural processes cloaked in secrecy and put under God's providential government, Albert, in fact, deciphers them by referring to Aristotle's *Historia animalium* (and to his own *De animalibus libri XXVI*), where details on times and modes of pregnancy, gestation and parturition are actually given, in a comparative study of several species²¹. Then Albert goes on sketching a description of the ibex: «The *ibex* is a capricorn which climbs and dwells in rocky and mountainous areas; its horns are so huge that extend from the back of its head to its rump. When it falls it protects its entire body within the horns, with no harm»²². As a matter of fact, here Albert recycles parts of what he had previously written on the steinbock, *caper montanus*, in his *De animalibus* (where that animal is said to be «found in our lands» and «very abundant in the German Alps»²³). In other words, he tries to explain the Middle Eastern fauna of the Book of Job by recy-

²¹ See Aristotle, *Historia animalium*, book VI, and its paraphrasis in Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus libri XXVI*, e.g. tr. 2, cap. 2: «De regime coitus et impraegnationis piscium ovantium et non ovantium», tr. 3, cap. 2 «De regimine coitus et impraegnationis et partus animalium quadrupedum», where manifold and detailed passages are devoted to the *tempus impraegnationis* (or *cubationis*) of several animals.

²² Albertus Magnus, *Commentarii in Iob*, 458, 16-23: «Ibex autem capricornus, animal scansivum et in petris commorativum et in montibus, tam ingentia habens cornua, ut a capite retro exeuntis usque ad clunes pertingant, intra quae aliquando cadens totum corpus recipit, ne collidatur in casu».

²³ Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, XII, 3, 7: 891, 15-20: «Apud nos autem nullum omnino animal inventum est, quod cursile sit et agile, et tam ingentia cornua habeat sicut caper montanus, quem Latine ybicum vocant: huius enim cornua a capite usque ad clunes protenduntur, et cadens ab alto totum corpus inter cornua protegit a collisione et ictus lapidum magnorum excipit cornibus»; XXII, 2, 1: 1405, 1-8: «Ibex est animal de genere capri colore fulvum in Alpibus Alemaniae habundans, quantitate maius magno hyrco, vastis valde cornibus capite honustis, ita ut cadens de rupibus totum corpus cornibus excipiat, scandens valde rupes».

cling the description of a European animal whose habitat is the rocky environment along the snow line of the European Alps. However, it must be noticed that the sections on the European ibex in the *De animalibus* already included the folklore of overestimating the shock-absorbing protection offered by the horns (a traditional gloss for the biblical ibex, attested in previous literature, such as Gregory and the Latin Bestiary)²⁴.

If most of the animals of Job 38:36-39:4 are elusive and little known, the following verses (39:5-40) shift focus to other animals: wild ass, wild ox, ostrich, horse, hawk, and vulture; some of them may be better known, but they are still far from the human sphere, as they are strong, wild and do not let themselves be tamed. The ostrich (39:13-18) stimulates the imagination because this animal combines «different properties drawn from other animals» and «is a bird very close [...] to land beasts» (Thomas)²⁵, a taxonomically mixed animal, «both capable of walking (*gressibile*) and flying (*volatile*)» (Albert)²⁶.

Gregory saw the ostrich as a stand-in of the hypocrite, since his wings have only a deceptive resemblance to those of the heron and the hawk (cf. Job 39:13), but this animal is unable to fly: «Thus [...] are all hypocrites, who, in simulating the conduct of the good, have a resemblance of a holy appearance but no reality of it» (*Moralia* XXXI, v, 11). Gregory gives no proper description of the ostrich, but emphasizes the disproportion between his small wings and his body, as opposed to the balance of these parts in the heron and the

hawk: this is why these latter more perfect birds, a type of the elect, can fly, while the ostrich/hypocrite has a burden that ends to weigh him down to earth (XXXI, v, 13).

In commenting on Job 39:13-18, Thomas Aquinas opts for a minimal descriptive realism, totally dependent on pieces of information drawn from Thomas of Cantimpré's *De naturis rerum*: the ostrich, which has wings but cannot properly fly, is a bird «very close [...] to land beasts»; unlike other birds, the female ostrich does not hatch her own eggs, but digs them in the sand; she «has a natural instinct for recognizing warm weather, namely, when the constellation called Virgo begins to appear in the month of July: then she lays eggs, and so, thanks to the heat of the season and the place (since she lives only in hot climates), the eggs are hatched and the chicks come out of them»; the ostrich is a forgetful animal (*animal obliviosum*) that has no care in guarding her eggs; rightly the Bible says that the ostrich «laughs at the mounted horse», because, with the help of his wings, this animal runs more swiftly than a horse carrying a man²⁷.

Whereas Aquinas merely repeats information from Thomas of Cantimpré, Albert the Great, after briefly recalling Gregory's symbolic identification of the ostrich with the hypocrite (without explaining it, though), launches into a virtuosic descriptive tour de force that draws numerous traits on his own *De animalibus* (and, hence, from Aristotle, too), but also adds new descriptive features. Traits borrowed from the *De animalibus* are italicized:

Here the text mentions an animal composed of *the ability of walking and the ability to fly* (which, according to Gregory, is a type of hypocrite) and shows the laws that govern his way of life and generation. [...] *The ostrich is a bird of Lybia,*

²⁴ Gregorius Magnus, *Moralia in Iob*, XXX, x, 39: «Quae [ibices] quando etiam de altis saxorum cacuminibus ruunt, in suis se cornibus illaesa suscipiunt». Cf., e.g., the Latin Bestiary (second family), as witnessed by Aberdeen University Library MS 24, fol. 11r: «ibex duo cornua habens, quorum tanta vis est ut si ab alto montis ad yma dimissus fuerit corpus eius totum iis duobus cornibus sustentetur»; or pseudo-Hugh of St. Victor (possibly Hugh of Folloy), *De bestiis at aliis rebus*, II, 15: «Est animal quod dicitur ibex, duo cornua habens, quorum tanta vis est ut, si ab alto montis demissus fuerit ad ima, totum corpus sustentetur illaesus his cornibus».

²⁵ Thomas de Aquino, *Expositio super Iob*, 210, 156-161.

²⁶ Albertus Magnus, *Commentarii in Iob*, 461, 41-42.

²⁷ Thomas de Aquino, *Expositio super Iob*, 210:159-212 (*passim*): details concerning the Virgo constellation, the fact of being forgetful, and of running more swiftly than a horse are modeled after Thomas Cantimpratensis, *Liber de natura rerum*, V, cx, ll. 4-8 and 39.

always dwelling *in the deserts*. He has *flashy legs*, as a quadruped, and three ungulate toes on each foot, as quadrupeds, a beak from his head and a swan-like neck, *very large thighs*, as quadrupeds have; *feathers are ash grey in his first year*, but in the elderly age they are thinned down to a *blackish fluff*, like the fleece of a black sheep, especially on his wings. *He does not fly*, but jumps, using the wings movement, as the locust does.

Then the text comes to dealing with the way of his generation: «When [the female ostrich] lays her eggs on the ground», that is to say, without warming them, because if she were to hatch them, she would crush them; for this reason she does not hatch, as does not even the snake, the lizard, and the turtle, «are you the one», must be understood in an ironic and derisive way, «who warms them in the dust?»²⁸, placed over is implied, because this animal *covers the eggs with the dust*; as if the text was saying: of course not; it is *the heat of the sun* that excites the inner heat of the egg, below the shell; so the chick is formed and comes out of egg shell; the rumor that they warm the eggs with their eyesight is false²⁹; this may seem to the inexperienced, because the animal is often around the eggs and looks at them to protect them; for such reason the hardness of those who abandon their children is compared to the ostrich³⁰.

Obviously, here Albert goes well beyond the biblical *littera*. His attention to natural particulars—an enrichment of referential value—is a strong stance of exegetical realism, of a dialogue

²⁸ At 39:14b, whereas the Hebrew text has the ostrich that lets the eggs warm in the sand, the Vulgate has: «Quando derelinquit ova sua in terra, tu forsitan in pulvere calefacies ea?»

²⁹ Albertus Magnus, *Commentarii in Iob*, 462:31-32: «et quid dicitur, quod visu fovet, falsum est». Cf. Alexander Neckam, *De naturis rerum libri duo*, I, 50: «mira est virtus radiatorum visualium struthionis, qui visu solo ita fovet ova sua in arena recondita, ut ex illi egrediantur pulli in lucem».

³⁰ Albertus Magnus, *Commentarii in Iob*, 461:41-462:35. Cf. *De animalibus* XXIII, tr. un., c. 24, 1510:11-36.

between biblical exegesis and natural philosophy. Yet, it might also risk betraying the biblical *intentio auctoris*. God's speech is pointing out to Job the limits of human knowledge and power. For such reason He makes references to elusive animals and far from our field of experience, as well as to strong animals that do not let themselves be tamed or handled. When the logic of the Bible demands that we remain in awe before the mystery of Providence, why should one try to explain what the divine speech had left cryptic or disproportionate?

4. JOB 40-41 AS AUGMENTED ZOOLOGY: BEHEMOTH AND LEVIATHAN

With the two animals of chapters 40 and 41, Behemoth and Leviathan, the biblical text moves away from the realism of previous sections. It is customary to spell them capitalized as if they were proper names. Debatable as it may be, nevertheless such capitalization mirrors an indecision in the Vulgate, where the two terms are not translated but simply transliterated from the Hebrew. Quite likely, this indecision stems from the original ambivalence of the two animals in the biblical text, where naturalistic and symbolic traits intertwine. In Hebrew, *behemoth*, the plural of *behemah* (beast, animal, cattle), presumably is what grammarians call an intensive plural, aimed here at indicating the beast *par excellence* (for tonnage or for symbolic value) or a great ox (at Job 40:15 it is said that he «eats grass like an ox») (Day [1985]: 76). Some of the naturalistic and descriptive traits (his body is massive and heavy-muscled, he is herbivore and lives by the rivers) might lead to think of the hippopotamus (some interpreters have also suggested some kind of sea ox or the elephant). Yet, it would be odd to compare the hippopotamus' tail, which is very small, to the cedar (41:17), which is remarkable for its height (see, e.g., Isa. 2:13 or Amos 2:9). Again, the comparison of the animal's bones and sinews with tubes of bronze and bars of iron (vv. 17-18) too would be odd, since in the hippopotamus these parts are not

protruded (Day [1985]: 76-77). Furthermore, it is written that Behemoth is «the first of the ways of God» (*rê-šît dar-kê-ël*) and that «only his creator can approach him with His sword» (40:19). These traits suggest either a primordial being (perhaps related to the great sea monsters of Gen. 1:24) or a symbolization of the primordial chaos itself that God constantly holds at bay, to preserve the order of creation (cf. Vicchio [2006]: 217).

As for the Leviathan, part of the description («jaws surrounded by terrifying teeth», «scales [...] shut up together as with a close seal») might suggest the crocodile (and this would be consistent with the Hebrew word *leviathan*, that means “twisted”, “coiled”, “tortuous”). However, naturalistic features are immediately complemented by fantastic bestiary-like traits that suggest a sort of dragon: «His sneezings flash forth light [...], out of his nostrils comes forth smoke [...]. His breath kindles coals, and a flame comes forth from his mouth» (41:10-13). The Leviathan, a marine monster often recalled in the mythologies of the Ancient Near East (Korpel-de Moor [2017]), is evoked six times in the Bible, two times in the book of Job and four times elsewhere: as a primordial aquatic animal that God has defeated (Ps. 74:13-14), with which He now plays (Ps. 104:25-26), and that He will defeat again, if necessary (Isa. 27:1); it is also written that the Leviathan is invoked in spells that, according to popular belief, might awaken him, plunging the world into chaos (Job 3:8). It should not be neglected that the specialists of Semitic languages have long pointed out the connection between the Hebrew *leviathan* and the Ugaritic *ltn*, a term for a mythological dragon (Emerton [1982]: 327-331; Smith [2001]: 36 and n. 71).

Finally, many scholars consider the section on Behemoth and Leviathan as an addition which is not strictly necessary, given the following considerations: there are marked lexical and stylistic differences between chapters 40-41 and the rest of the book; this second speech of God, in its solemnity, lacks the pressing of rhetorical questions so typical of the first speech; the description of the two animals is not only longer and more emphatic than the previous ones, but focuses more on

bodily description than on behavior; Behemoth and Leviathan, in so far as they are understood as mythical beings, are different from the realistic animals of the first discourse; in so far as they bear the traits of hippopotamus and crocodile, recall Egyptian animals, not animals of the Palestinian area, as were those of chapters 38-39 (Dell [1991]: 206, n. 128).

The Fathers of the Church, stressing the monstrous character of the two animals, saw in them exotic names and figurative counterparts of the Devil (Breed [2010]). Gregory developed this association in his *Moralia*, making it clear that Behemoth is a depiction of the *ancient enemy*³¹. Accordingly, even the naturalistic and descriptive features of the biblical pages are dissolved into theologico-moral allegories. For example, when the Bible says that «the sinews of his testicles are wrapped together» (40:17), Gregory takes the inspiration from the polysemy of the Latin term for “wrapped together”, i.e. *perplexi*, to lead the discourse to moral theology: «it is rightly written that “the sinews of his testicles *perplexi sunt*”, since this Behemoth binds with such inextricable knots, that the mind, when brought into doubt, binds itself firmer in sin by trying to get rid of sin»³². When Behemoth «raises his tail as a cedar», this is taken as the symbol of punishments and tortures (XXXII, xv, 24). When the Vulgate reads «ossa eius velut fistulae aeris» (40:18a) Gregory sees in them the «bones of Antichrist», that «multiply the wicked by keeping them together», like

³¹ Gregorius Magnus, *Moralia in Iob*, XXXII, xii, 16: «Quem sub Behemoth nomine, nisi antiquum hostem insinuat, qui interpretatus ex hebraica voce in lingua latina animal sonat?» Accordingly, even a difficult passage of the biblical text («Ecce Behemoth *quem feci tecum*») finds an explanation: Behemoth/Devil, like all other angelic creatures, has received, in common with man, the difference of rationality: «In cuncta [...] creatura homo et angelus simul conditus existit, quia ab omni creatura irrationali distinctus processit», *Moralia*, XXXII, xii, 17.

³² *Ivi*, XXXII, xx, 38: «Quia ergo Behemoth iste ita inexplicabilibus nodis ligat, ut plerumque mens in dubium adducta, unde se a culpa solvere nititur, inde in culpa arctius astringatur, recte dicitur “nervi testicularum eius perplexi sunt”».

the bones «support the flesh in his body» (XXXII, xvii, 29).

Both Albert and Thomas are aware of the ambivalence, between natural and symbolic, of the two animals of Job 40-41. While agreeing on this basic assumption, the two Dominicans follow different paths. The naturalistic implausibility of these animals urges Albert to read chapters 40 and 41 unlike previous chapters, i.e. as an extended allegory of human sexuality and propensity to sin. Thomas, who, in the two previous sections, had used little or nothing of Aristotelian naturalistic information, paradoxically begins to do it broadly in these two chapters, to determine the realistic features of Behemoth and of Leviathan, which, ultimately, he too believes to be symbolic animals³³.

Thomas underscores that Behemoth and Leviathan actually refer to the Devil depicted under the traits of the elephant and the whale («sub figura elephantis et ceti»). These, in turn, refer to the dynamics of bodily life and sin in man. In a metaphorical way (*metaphorice*) or “under the figure” (*sub figura*), the description of Behemoth in vv. 10-19 represents «man’s victory over the Devil under the figure of elephant hunting»; soon after, to tone down the belief that man, through his own power, can overcome the Devil, the Bible depicts, under the figure of Leviathan, an exhausting whale hunting (i.e. a fight with the Devil), where, in the end, man, invariably, is the loser³⁴. Consequently, even if Aquinas, in his commentary on Job 40-41, offers a good wealth of naturalistic information

³³ Thomas de Aquino, *Expositio super Iob*, 216, 258-281. Cf. Steel (1999); Vijgen (2015: 295-296); Harkins (2016: 195).

³⁴ Thomas de Aquino, *Expositio super Iob*, 219, 527-533: «Et quia superius victoriam hominis contra Diabolum expresserat sub figura venationis elephantis, ne credatur quod homo sua virtute Diabolum possit superare, hoc incipit excludere sub figura Leviathan. De quo primo ostendit quod non potest superari per modum quo capiuntur pisces, unde dicit “An extrahere poteris”, scilicet de aquis, “Leviathan hamo?”. This passage is surrounded by images of huge whales sending forth water (514-520) and of ineffective hunting techniques (533-673).

(reinforced with 8 quotations from Albert the Great, 7 from Aristotle, 5 from Thomas of Cantimpré, and 2 from Bartholomaeus Anglicus), all these natural particulars are given just as literal counterparts of a demonological discourse, which is, ultimately, traditional.

So, to give an example, when commenting on Job 40:16-17 (Behemoth «sleeps in the shade of trees, in a thicket of reeds in wet places. The shadows protect his shadow, the willows of the brook surround him»), Aquinas briefly indulges on naturalistic details on the habitat of the elephant (drawn from Aristotle and Albert the Great), but soon applies them to a demonological figurative interpretation.

As Aristotle says in his Book on Animals V, “Elephants stay in lonely places and especially on the banks of rivers”. [...] According to the literal sense, the elephant dwells in shadowy places because he is a melancholic animal with a dry complexion who happens to live in hot climates, so he seeks the refreshment of wetness and shade against summer heat and dryness. [...] By this He means that the Devil’s sword has effect not only in the mountains, i.e. in proud people [...], but also in men who live in the shade of idleness. Since shadows protect shadows, these men take great care to keep this shadow for them and nourish themselves with pleasures as in wet places³⁵.

Or, to give another telling example, when commenting on Job 41:4a («Who can strip off Leviathan’s outer garment?»), at first Aquinas quotes a long passage from Albert’s *De animalibus*, but, eventually, here too interpretation is reduced to demonology.

He goes on describing the power of Leviathan, and first He describes his shape, beginning with the head. It is said that “above the whale’s eyes there are horn-like appendages [...] shaped like the large scythe used to cut grain, and there are two hundred fifty over one

³⁵ Ivi, 218:425-427 (quoting Aristotle, *Historia animalium*, V, 2, 540a20-22), 437-449 (possibly referring to Albert the Great’s *Quaestiones super De animalibus*, II, q. 14 or to Peter of Spain’s *Questiones Super Libro De Animalibus Aristotelis*, II, q. 2, 79). Cf. Steel (1999): 24.

eye and the same number over the other, and this fish uses them for an eye covering in the time of a great storm”³⁶. To express this He says “Who can strip off Leviathan’s outer garment?” That is: what man can approach so near to the whale that he can strip these coverings from his face? By this one can understand that no man is able to reveal the cunning tricks of the Devil³⁷.

Many other examples of the same tenor could be adduced (see Vijgen [2015]: 295-296). However, what matters is that the literal level, reinforced by several references to naturalistic literature, is just the metaphorical prelude to the second level of figural and proper interpretation in line with the traditional theology of demonic temptation and sin³⁸.

Unlike Thomas, Albert does not identify Behemoth and Leviathan with the Devil, but prefers to analyze their symbolism in anthropological and theologico-moral terms. God’s first speech at chapters 38-39 has made it clear to Job that no man can be clean (*mundus*). Now is the time to show the cause of such uncleanness (*immunditia*) and perversity (*perversitas*)³⁹. Descent into sin begins when our intellect is misguided by the imaginative and sensible faculties. Accordingly, «Behemoth is the name given» by the biblical author «to that corrupt and sick nature, that is the cause of perversity, because Behemoth means “animal”»⁴⁰. Furthermore, «while Behemoth represents the sensuality of humans, i.e. an animal life, guided only by the dissolute lasciviousness of the five senses, [...] Leviathan is the contagion of that

ancient serpent (*infectio primi serpentis*), transmitted by Eve [...] as a poison to the whole human race»⁴¹.

When commenting on Behemoth and Leviathan (Job 40-41), Albert reframes them within the categories of a theological anthropology of sin, mostly focusing on the physiology of sexuality and reproduction, because the root of sin is in the lower level of our animal nature. Thus, «“Behemoth”, which means animal, is the animal and brutal nature in you, “which I made with you”, so that you were not just pure intellect but also endowed with animal intellect»⁴². Accordingly, the traditional link between hips (*lumbi*) and luxury (already attested in Gregory the Great and repeated in Aquinas), receives here a detailed physiological treatment. «Fortitudo eius in lumbis eius» (40:11a) hints at the male, who has «sensitive nerves in his hips; when the semen, descending from the brain and body, comes into contact with the inner part of the nerves, this stimulation excites the libido and, with the power of pleasure, it bends and subverts the part of the mind that should devote itself to wisdom»⁴³. The following «virtus illius in umbilico ventris eius» (40:11b) refers to the female: her «matrix, whose nerves are stimulated by the semen received during the coitus, has a cone that reaches the navel; when those nerves are stimulated, the female experiences an intense pleasure»⁴⁴. By saying «stringit caudam quasi cedrum», «he stiffens his tail like a cedar tree» (40:12a), the text alludes to «how the semen is compressed into the genitals [...]. The genital member is called “tail” because it is the tail of all nerves and contains the extremities of all nerves; when it is compressed by the force of pleasure, it compresses all the nerves; by the constriction of these, the semen is secreted from the whole body,

³⁶ Albertus Magnus, *De animalibus*, XXIV, cap. un., 1522, 35-1523, 8, *passim*; Engl. transl. by K.F. Kitchell – I. M. Resnick (see bibliography), slightly modified to match the way Thomas quotes it.

³⁷ Thomas de Aquino, *Expositio super Iob*, 223, 51-60.

³⁸ This two-layered textual organization (compilation of information and theological interpretation), to be found also in 13th c. encyclopedias, is not far from an up-to-date version of a patristic and Carolingian model (suffice it to think of Rabanus Maurus’ *De rerum naturis*) (Peffetti [2017]: 284-288).

³⁹ Albertus Magnus, *Commentarii in Iob*, 475, 45-476, 1.

⁴⁰ *Ivi*: 476, 14-18. Cf. Chardonnens (1997: 252, n. 4).

⁴¹ *Ivi*, 484, 1-10.

⁴² *Ivi*, 476, 36-42.

⁴³ *Ivi*, 477, 10-16.

⁴⁴ *Ivi*, 477, 24-29. Cf. Id., *De animalibus*, VI, tr. 1, c. 3, 450, 10-13: «mulier praegnans plus delectatur in coitu quam illa quae non est impraegnata, propterea quod semen conceptum movet nervos, et ideo quaerit confriktionem».

through the concavity of the nerves and the sponginess of the flesh, until it reaches the areas of generation»⁴⁵.

Not content with these Kinsey-report tones, Albert clarifies this last point by abridging Avicenna: «semen is squeezed, Avicenna says, the way serum is squeezed from cheese»⁴⁶. Of course, the analogy of the embryonic development to the process of turning milk into cheese goes back to Aristotle⁴⁷, as Albert had already acknowledged when commenting on Job 10:10⁴⁸. The idea is that the male semen, in its leading role, acts like the clotting agent of milk, while the female semen, the receptive part, is the coagulum. Nevertheless, Avicenna famously gave it a Galenic coloring in his *Canon medicinae* by suggesting that, in analogy to the rennet when it clots milk, the male sperm does not act only as a formal cause, but also becomes part of the embryo's substance (like rennet and milk become parts of cheese)⁴⁹. The male semen churns into a drop of blood from which, later, the heart develops (cf. McGinnis [2010]: 234). Quite conveniently, Albert adds, Job 40:12a mentions the cedar tree, since «cedar is a strong wood and, when it is pressed, it produces a bloodlike sap (*succus sanguineus*)», (a remark patterned on what he had

written in his *De vegetabilibus*, apropos of the Cedrus Libani)⁵⁰.

The biblical text goes on by giving close-ups on rough details of the Behemoth's inguinal recesses: «the sinews of his testicles are wrapped together (*perplexi*)» (40:12b)⁵¹. Aquinas understands this half-verse as a theologico-anthropological metaphor: «if anyone fallen in this vice tries to escape, each time he is trapped even more in the net»⁵². In other words, Aquinas merely reformulates Gregory's analogy with the sinner's "perplexed" mind, that «when brought into doubt, binds itself firmer in sin by trying to get rid of sin». (We have seen it above, in this chapter).

Albert comments on this half-verse with a very different attitude. He wants to expand its physiological overtones or implicit meanings. In order to do this, he cleverly combines a good wealth of theories and textual snippets from Aristotle, Avicenna and even from his own *De animalibus*.

At first, one might be tempted to dismiss such counterpoints between the Bible and sexual physiology as demonstrations of Pantagruelic erudition and digressive *vana curiositas*. Yet, actually, in commenting on chapters 40 and 41, Albert wants to account for the powerfully rough peculiarities of the biblical text itself, very different from the naturalistic tones of previous chapters. Why does the Bible linger over those close-ups of Behemoth's

⁴⁵ *Ivi*, 476, 32-42.

⁴⁶ *Ivi*, 477, 41-43: «exprimitur semen [...], ut dicit Avicenna, sicut serum exprimitur a caseo».

⁴⁷ *De generatione animalium*, II, 4, 739b20-26.

⁴⁸ *Ivi*, 148, 41-43: «“Nonne sicut lac mulsisti me”, semen enim, cum sit superfluum quartae digestionis, primum est, sicut lac, et mulgetur per vim generativae potentiae de omnibus membris. “et sicut caseum me coagulasti?” gutta enim viri coniuncta guttae feminae vaporaliter ingreditur in eam [...] et coagulat, sicut coagulum vaporaliter ingreditur in lac et coagulat ipsum, sicut in XVI animalium dicit Aristoteles».

⁴⁹ Avicenna, *Liber Canonis* (= Avicenna (1507), I, fen 1, doctrina 5, f. 8ra): «[...] de spermate masculi generatur sicut generatur caseus, de coagulo, et de spermate mulieris generatur sicut caseus generatur de lacte [...]. Et quemadmodum unumquodque duorum, coaguli videlicet et lactis, est pars substantiae casei qui sit ex eis, ita unumquodque duorum spermatur est pars substantiae embrionis». Cf. van 't Land [2012]: 380-382.

⁵⁰ Albertus Magnus, *De vegetabilibus libri VII*, VI 1, xi (49): «substantia eius dura, rubea et clara, ita quod in cedro non invenitur signaculum alicuius medullae. [...] Cedrorum etiam lignum in exteriori tunica est album, et interius est quasi denigratus sanguis, et succus eius sicut sanguis emanans de venis animalium».

⁵¹ Several details of the Scripture might actually refer to the *sexual* vigor of the Behemoth, as in Job, 40:17 (40:12 Vulgate): «raises his tail as a cedar, the sinews of his thighs [or stones] are wrapped together». Where the Vulgate has «nervi testicularum eius perplexi sunt», the very Hebrew term *pāhādō*, translated either as thighs or stones, may well be a euphemism for testicles. There are no direct terms in the Bible for male and female genitalia, only euphemisms are used. Cf. Elliott (2006: 168).

⁵² Thomas de Aquino, *Expositio super Iob*, 217, 368-370: «quia si aliquis in hoc vitium deiectus evadere nititur, diversis occasionibus iterato irretitur».

<i>Commentarii in Iob, 478, 6-19</i>	<i>Avicenna, Canon, III, 19, 1, 3</i>
Quia, sicut dicit Avicenna, semen superfluum est quartae digestionis, humor autem quartae digestionis ex sanguine exprimitur et colatur. [...] “Nervi testicularum eius perplexi sunt”. Testiculi, ut dicit Aristoteles, semen attrahunt, ut ventosa, hoc est calore colerae, de qua facti sunt, sicut ventosa calore ignis immissi. Suspensi sunt autem in caudis nervorum et nervi collimitati caudis suis per totum corpus complexi sunt reticulatim, ut undique semen trahant et expriment.	[...] semen est superfluitas digestionis quartae, quae fit cum dispartitur cibus in membris, resudando a venis, tertia digestionem iam expleta ⁵³ .
	Aristotle, <i>De gen. anim.</i> , II, 4, 737b31-32
	[...] dicunt quidam homines quod testiculi attrahunt sicut attrahit ventosa [...] ⁵⁴ .
	Albert the Great, <i>De animalibus</i> , III, 2, 8, 348:16-24
	[...] sperma, quod est superfluum quartae digestionis, exsudat ab omnibus membris, sed maxime a capite [...]. Per spongiositatem autem membrorum similium descendit et attrahitur a testiculis, sicut a ventosa attrahitur sanguis, et in testiculo alatur et accipit digestionem cum virtute formandi quae est a corde, et tunc est completum ad generationem.

thighs, tail, and inguinal recesses, if not to hint at a physiological power that is *natural* and *primitive* in God’s hands, but dangerous and almost unmanageable in the hands of man? It is therefore not necessary to draw the old enemy into play. The symbolism of Job 40-41 refers to something that is inherent in biological processes themselves, but can have disruptive outcomes on human nature, «when the intellect, which is right in itself, bonds too much with imagination and the senses», thus losing its ability to choose rationally; or, Albert adds, «as the Apostle says, 1Cor. 2:14: “Animalis homo non percipit ea quae sunt spiritus Dei”»⁵³.

The almost expressionist and disturbing force of biblical descriptions is there to tell us something about ourselves. Our animal level, this primary moment of human generation, manifests itself vigorously in sexuality and reveals its almost invincible power in our constant propensity to sin. That is why the Bible comes to assert that Behemoth «is the beginning of the ways of God», thusly explained by Albert:

The ways of God are the first traces of divine power in the generation of man, in which the animal level appears before the reason is revealed. It is written in the first letter to the Corinthians (15:46): “The spiritual did not come first, but the animal, and after that the spiritual”. Aristotle, too, in the XVI book on ani-

mals [= De gen. an., II, 3, 736a35-b1] says that what is alive is not yet animal, and what is animal is not yet man. Therefore, this pleasure (delectatio), being implanted (complantata) in our nature, binds us and entangles us even more, and is invincible, as Aristotle says in the second book of his Nicomachean Ethics⁵⁴.

5. FINAL REMARKS

The complexity and variety of interactions between biblical exegesis and philosophical and theological disciplines compel admiration (and sometimes leave us a bit baffled). Certainly, in the mind of our 13th century Dominicans, theology and biblical interpretation were the culmination of all knowledge and the place of confluence in which different scientific fields found their *veritative* end. Accordingly, Thomas’s and Albert’s bibli-

⁵⁴ Albertus Magnus, *Commentarii in Iob*, 479, 26-39. The final reference might hint at *Eth. nic.*, II.3, 1104b33-35. Intemperance and animal instincts in man are discussed in many pages of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (see books II-III and VII *passim*). Albert might also refer to his own *Ethica*, III, tr. 3, cap. 4 (= Albertus Magnus 1891: 259b): «In venereis autem [tactus causa delectationis] est tamquam ultima simulatione convenientibus et proprio et cum naturali spiritu in nervis tangibilibus diffusus. Propter quod coitus delectatio intensissima est et homini complantata». See also VII, tr. 1, cap. 9, 485b: «delectatio concupiscentiae naturae complantata est».

⁵³ Albertus Magnus, *Commentarii in Iob*, 476, 3-5 and 8-10.

cal commentaries integrate many sources of liberal knowledge within the framework of exegesis (and, by the way, this also shows to what end Albert had prescribed and fostered an extended philosophical training for his fellow-Dominicans)⁵⁵. The 13th century also saw the shift from the theologocentrism of previous interpreters to a new wave in biblical interpretation, more focused on the literary and argumentative structures of the text. Previous commentators of Origenian-Gregorian tradition, in their allegorical inventiveness, tended to overlook the literary structures of the Bible and the peculiarities of the *intentio auctoris*. Albert and Thomas, instead, have a strong focus on the global architecture and internal coherence of the narrative and argumentative blocks of the book of Job. As detailed in §§. 2 and 3, their conceptual and naturalistic analyses lie within these structural frames.

Then, however, the paths of the two interpreters diverge and reveal two different cultural sensitivities. Thomas Aquinas, in his lucid conciseness of expression, is able to reinvent many themes of the Patristic tradition. In general, his use of natural philosophy and naturalistic information (from encyclopedic authors, such as Thomas of Cantimpré and Bartholomaeus Anglicus, or even from Albert the Great) is collateral, or better, instrumental to his theological outlook. In Albert, instead, naturalistic and physiological pieces of information, drawn from Aristotle, Avicenna and others, are like a magnifying glass that amplifies details of the biblical page, making it almost three-dimensional, as in a pop-up book.

When Albert, going beyond the *littera*, tries to explain natural processes that the Bible just mentions – on top within a divine message that underscores their unknowability – is there not the risk to fall into a cultural and theological *hybris*? Well, maybe there is. Yet, in involving and intertwining different disciplines, Albert's exegesis also links the Bible to the world and to human cultures and

forms of knowledge. Thus, a profound relationship is established between biblical discourse and the world, between the Bible and possible experience. From the pages of philosophers and physicians, ancient and medieval, and from his own naturalistic commentaries, Albert collects and organizes the *experience*, and makes it available. In the Bible he finds the proper *meaning* of that experience.

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⁵⁵ For further inquiries on the interaction between naturalistic commentaries and biblical exegesis, see A. Cerreto, *Botany as Science and Exegetical Tool in Albert the Great*, in this same issue of "Aisthesis".

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