

ALBERT THE GREAT (Albert of Lauingen, Albert of Cologne)—theologian, philosopher, natural scientist, Bishop of Regensburg, called *doctor universalis*, *doctor expertus*, a doctor of the Church, b. around 1200 in Lauingen in Swabia, d. November 15, 1280 in Cologne.

Albert came from a family of Swabian knights. He studied in northern Italy, chiefly in Padua. In Padua in 1223 he entered the Dominicans. He was in the novitiate in Cologne and after completing his theological studies and receiving Holy Orders, from 1223 on he had the role of lector of the order in various convents (Hildesheim, Freiburg im Breisgau, Regensburg, and Strassburg). In the early 1240s, at the recommendation of the Dominican authorities, he went to Paris where he lectured on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard and prepared for a *magisterium* in theology, which he obtained in 1245. In Paris he developed his scholarly and didactic work and his writings, bearing fruit in many eminent works and acquiring exceptional renown. In 1248 Albert was transferred to Cologne to organize a *studium generale* for the Dominicans of the German province, and he directed this until 1254. One of his students at that school was Thomas Aquinas, who probably also heard Albert's lectures while in Paris. In 1252 Albert recommended Thomas for the position of Master of theology at the University of Paris. From 1254 to 1257 Albert was the provincial of the extensive German province. In Anagni, at the court of Pope Alexander IV, he participated in a defense of the mendicant orders (1256). He also led a disputation concerning Averroes' doctrine of the unicity of the intellect. He spent the year 1257 to 1260 again in Cologne teaching. In 1260 Pope Alexander IV appointed Albert as the Bishop of Regensburg. After two years at his own request he was relieved of his duties as ordinary of the diocese and as a papal legate preached a crusade in the German-speaking lands. From 1264 to 1270 he was again in Würzburg and Strassburg, then returned to Cologne. Besides his scholarly and literary work, he was active with many duties connected with his authority to consecrate bishops. He also had the role of judge and arbiter. He took part in the Second Council of Lyons (1274), but whether he went to Paris (1276) is open to question (Weisheipl). In Paris he was supposed to defend the positions of Thomas, who by that time was already dead, against the condemnation that had been prepared.

Apart from Thomas, who went his own way, even though he owed so much to his teacher, Albert taught other eminent students (Hugo Ripelin, Ulrich of Strassburg, and Dietrich of Freiburg). These disciples chiefly developed his neo-Platonic theories. Albert had a great influence on the intellectual life of the Middle Ages. In the fifteenth century Albert was beatified at the request of the University of Cologne where the Albertists had gained a strong position. He was canonized in 1931.

Albert's literary accomplishments are imposing. He wrote *De natura boni* before 1240. During his time in Paris he wrote: *De Sacramentis*, *De Incarnatione*, *De bono*, *De quattuor coaequaevis*, *De homine*, and *Super IV libros Sententiarum*. His philosophical encyclopedia was written over many years (until around 1270) and it contains paraphrases of almost all of the known works of Aristotle, and even goes beyond their catalogue. These works are: *Physica*, *De caelo et mundo*, *De natura loci*, *De causis proprietatum elementorum*, *De generatione et corruptione*, *Meteora*, *Mineralia*, *De anima* and the so-called *parva naturalia* (*De nutrimento et nutribili*, *De sensu et sensato*, *De memoria et reminiscencia*, *De intellectu et intelligibili*, *De somno et vigilia*, *De spiritu et respiratione*, *De motibus animalium*, *De iuventute et senectute*, and *De morte et vita*), *De vegetabilibus*, *De animalibus*, *De principiis motus processivi*, *De natura et origine animae*, *Metaphysica*, *Ethica* and *Super Ethica*, and *Politica*. He connected his paraphrases of Aristotle's logical works (*Peri hermeneia*,

*Analytica priora, Analytica posteriora, Topica, De sophisticis elenchis*) with paraphrases of Porphyry (*Super Porphyrium De V praedicamentis*), Boethius (*De divisione*), and Gilbert (*De sex principiis*). His other paraphrases were *Liber de causis (De causis et processu universitatis a causa prima)*, the works of Pseudo-Dionysius (*Super Dionysium De divinis nominibus, Super Dionysii mysticam theologian, Super Dionysium De caelesti hierarchia, Super Dionysii epistulas*). His minor works include: *De unitate intellectus, De XV problematibus, Problemata determinata, and De fato*. Albert' was writing his last work toward the end of his life, the unfinished *Summa theologiae de mirabili scientia Dei*. Many of Albert's work are biblical commentaries, homiletic works, and works on Christian spirituality. Not all of Albert's works have been published, and over the centuries many inauthentic works have been published under his name (e.g., *Summa philosophiae naturalis, Speculum astronomiae, De secretis mulierum, De alchemia*).

Collections of Albert's works have been published: *Alberti Magni Opera*, ed. P. Jammy, Ly 1651, 21 volumes; *Opera omnia*, ed. A. Borgnet, P 1890–1899, 36 volumes; starting in 1951 the Institute of Albert the Great in Cologne began the publication of a critical edition (*Editio Colonensis*) which is planned to include 40 volumes: *Sancti Doctoris Ecclesiae Alberti Magni, Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum, Opera omnia, ad fidem codicum manuscriptorum edenda, apparatu critico, notis prolegomenis, indicibus instruenda curavit Institutum Alberti Magni Coloniense Bernhardo Geyer praeside (ab 1978 Wilhelmo Kübel praeside)*. At present 13 volumes have been published, consisting of 9 volumes that have two parts each and 4 single volumes, and 2 other volumes have been published in part.

Certain texts have been separately published prior to that, e.g., *De animalibus libri XXVI*, 2 volumes, ed. H. Stadler, Mr 1916–1920. There are also fragmentary lectures in modern languages.

Albert's accomplishments are primarily connected with the history the reception of Aristotelianism in western Europe, a history that was not without conflict. He was the first to attempt to explain and transmit the whole of Greek and Arab philosophical and scientific thought to Latin culture, as he was convinced that this would be an opportunity for progress and growth. In his works, Albert collected a wealth of material from diverse sources (Aristotelianism, neo-Platonism, Arab thought, Augustinianism) and from diverse domains (theology, philosophy, and various areas of the science of his time), but his ability to compile sources was often not equal to his ability to integrate them into a whole. Yet he was not merely a collector, compiler and man of erudition, as some have judged him. In some recent scholarly works we see a tendency to explore Albert the Great's texts in greater depth, which makes it possible for us to reach the leading ideas that unify the polymorphous world of his thought, and a new method of interpretation has been proposed (H. Anzulewicz).

**THEOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY.** Albert the Great's philosophical and theological position rose from his conviction that natural knowledge, as he called philosophy following Aristotle, does not pose a threat to theology, since they are different domains, both with respect to their objects and to their methods. Theology speaks in the light of Revelation of God as the highest good and the beatific end of human desires, and of piety as the path to union with God. It is affective knowledge, involves the entire man, and gives him an orientation in life. We should emphasize that Albert the Great's understanding of theology was not the same as Thomas'. In his conception of theology, Albert remained faithful to St. Augustine, while in his conception of natural science (or philosophy) he followed Aristotle. For Albert, philosophy had value in itself, not only in view of its service to theology. Philosophy seeks

the truth in the world and relies on the reason as the ultimate instance of evidence. In his theological works, Albert employed his wide philosophical learning. He was interested in comparing what the “saints” had said (those who expressed the doctrinal traditions of Christianity) with the opinions of the philosophers, and he valued the role of philosophy in investigating and defending the truths of the faith.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF BEING. Albert the Great followed Aristotle in dividing theoretical philosophy (which he called “real”, as distinct from “moral” and “rational” philosophy, namely ethics and logic) into: (a) physics, whose object is the “changing body” (“*corpus mobile*”); (b) mathematics, which studied the quantitative aspect of material things; and (c) metaphysics, which studies being as being, prior to the more specific descriptions and differentiations that were studied by the other sciences, and for this reason metaphysics is the first philosophy. Since metaphysics rises to the knowledge of immaterial beings and the first cause, it excels the other sciences also in dignity (it is the “divine” science).

Albert’s paraphrase of the *Metaphysics* presents a systematic lecture in the first philosophy. For Albert as for Aristotle, substance is the fundamental category of being, while form is the fundamental element of being. Form gives a being “*esse*” (form shapes a being’s essence). Form gives a being “*ratio*” (form is the principle of knowledge and the basis for definition). Besides the “form of the part” (“*forma partis*”), which shapes matter in hylemorphically composite beings, Albert introduces the “form of the whole” (“*forma totius*”), which shapes the specific nature of an individual being. Here Albert uses the terminology of Boethius who distinguishes in every being apart from the first being “*quo est*” or “*esse*” (the defined specific nature), and “*quod est*” (the individual being). Albert uses this distinction when he explains the ontological structure of spiritual beings (angels and the human spirit—the structure of spiritual beings is expressed differently in philosophical writings such as *De anima*). Albert also uses this distinction to explain intellectual abstraction. It is thus connected with the problem of universals (Albert distinguishes the universal “*ante rem*”, “*in re*”, and “*post rem*”; the universal “*post rem*” is the intellectually apprehended total form), and it is connected with Avicenna’s conception of a “common nature” (“*natura communis*”). Both distinct forms concern the same essential level in the analysis of being. This leads to difficulties in interpretation. His sporadic use of the term “*esse*” (“*quo est*”) to denote existence does not play any greater role in Albert’s writings, as some have thought. Albert rejects the concept of spiritual matter and universal hylemorphism. He demonstrates that hylemorphic composition occurs only in material beings. He also rejects in principle pluralism of forms. Lower forms do not actually co-exist in one being with a higher form, but they become potencies of the higher form according to the principle of the order of formal causes (e.g., the vegetative and sensory souls do not actually exist in man apart from his rational soul, but they are the potential “parts” of the rational soul). Albert conceives of prime matter as the potential element in being, but his conception differs from that of Thomas. Albert holds that if a form is to be united with matter, it must first be initiated or in a germinal state in the matter (“*inchoatio formae*”, a counterpart to “*rationes seminales*?”); thus prime matter is not pure potency.

Aristotle’s first motor of the universe becomes for Albert the Great the first efficient cause of everything, God the Creator and the end of the desires of all creatures, and the form that shapes everything by his light. Albert interprets Aristotle in the light of the *Liber de causis*, holding that this text is the completion and crowning of the *Metaphysics*. In Albert’s paraphrase of the *Liber de causis*, called *De causis et processu universitatis*, Albert writes of all being in relation to the first cause. The work presents a neo-Platonic image of the

universe inscribed on to an Aristotelian model of the cosmos. It is an hierarchical universe connected by a chain of transmitted and received influences. The universe is described in a manner close to the metaphysics of emanation, although it is interpreted in the spirit of monotheism and creationism. Albert strongly emphasizes God's transcendence. We know of God only what we can infer from the fact that he is the first cause and creator, and the highest intellect who penetrates and encompasses the whole universe with his uncreated light (which is the principle that shapes the universe). God is the source of all being and knowledge, the efficient and formal cause of everything. He is absolutely first, necessary, unique and simple. He is life, fulness of wisdom, the highest good, omnipotent, and at the same time inconceivable in his essence. The universe is a reflection in degrees of God's uncreated light. The intelligences stand highest in the hierarchy—these are pure spiritual beings who move the cosmic spheres yet exist in complete independence from matter and bear in themselves a likeness to the first cause. Albert follows his model (the *Liber de causis*) and repeats that “to-be (*esse*) is the first among created things.” “*Esse*” is the first direct effect of the first cause. It is “being” is its highest generality, before all closer determinations and concretizations. How this first “*esse*” is related to the first intelligence is not completely clear. The first intelligence occupies a special place in the universe and seems to contain the outline of the entire universe. After the intelligences are the souls endowed with intellect (*animae nobiles*, which exist “at the boundary of eternity and time”). Although they are connected with bodies, they are like the intelligences independent of matter in their existence. Next there are forms that are inseparably connected with matter, starting from sensory and vegetative souls, which partially overcome an immersion in matter, to minerals and elements, which are completely immersed in matter. The uncreated light operates in the whole universe, pouring out through all its regions and using their intermediate degrees and their operations as instruments. The operations of the intelligences, the motions of the heavenly spheres, the “*virtus formativa*” in seeds, the properties of the elements, and the elementary qualities are all connected into the dynamic structure of the universe. This structure is created and upheld by the first cause. These visions are inspired by the *Liber de causis* and the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, and they are repeated throughout Albert's works. They are the framework for Albert's particular exposition of philosophy. In this context, the concepts of Aristotelian metaphysics (especially the concept of form) take on new meaning. The metaphor of light is raised to the rank of an ontological principle. Albert refers here not only to neo-Platonic conceptions, but to a metaphysics of light.

THE CONCEPTION OF MAN. Albert repeatedly treats the problematic of man, beginning with his *Summa de homine*, and in both his theological and philosophical writings. His conception of man differs from that of Thomas, although there are verbal similarities. Albert insists on a conception of the soul that comes from Augustine (and ultimately from Plato), that the soul is a complete spiritual substance. However, he does not reject Aristotle's conception of the soul as the form (act or perfection) of the body. He tries to treat both conceptions of the soul as complementary and Avicenna provides him with the key to resolve the problem. Albert accepts Avicenna's explanation that Aristotle conceives of the soul not in its essence, but with respect to its function for the body. In itself, the soul is a spiritual substance like an angel, but differing from an angel in its “inclination to a body” (“*inclinatio ad corpus*”), or its ability to join with a body (the soul is “*unibilis corpori*”).

In *De anima*, the soul is treated as being similar to an intelligence, as an “somewhat clouded intelligence” (or “*creata in umbra intelligentiae*”), The soul truly shapes the existence of the body and gives the body “*esse et ratio*”, but it is not the form of the body by its essence. Furthermore, the body must be capable of connection with the soul and shaped in a certain way

before the connection takes place (of all the bodies on earth, the human body is most similar to a heavenly body). Some writers see in Albert the Great's conception of the soul a certain form of corporeality. In Albert's later writings, beginning with *De anima*, the "division" of the soul is more strongly emphasized. One model that accurately illustrates the human being is the metaphor of the sailor and the boat (the *nauta* and *navis* from Plato's laws). According to Albert, for the soul to be the act of the body means that the soul performs living operations (*opera vitae*); the soul is "the body's motor". The soul animates and "governs" the body (which Albert explains in terms of the instrumental nature of the body as it was emphasized by Avicenna). In light of the definition of the soul as a "dynamic whole" ("*totum potestativum*"), the soul alone is the basic subject of all living operations. Some of these operations are performed with the help of the bodily organs (sensory and vegetative operations), while others (spiritual operations) are performed without the participation of the body. The soul has its own structure of being: it is composed of "*quo est*" and "*quod est*" and therefore is "*hoc aliquid*" (a complete substance). In his philosophical writings, Albert uses other terms (the actual and potential principle, the light from the first cause—the subject that receives and limits the light).

The active and potential intellects are components of the soul's structure. The active intellect (*intellectus agens*) flows out from the soul's "*quo est*" (or from its actual element), and the potential intellect is based in the soul's "*quod est*" (or in the structural potential principle). Both intellects, as "parts" of the soul, are an endowment of being for each individual soul and they constitute the soul's "essential parts" (*partes essentielles*). Besides this ontological justification of the theory of two intellects, we find in Albert's writings a justification based on an analysis of the process of intellectual knowledge. This analysis is based on Aristotle's genetic empiricism. Intellectual knowledge consists in the potential intellect grasping a cognitive form that the active intellect abstracts from mental images. This is the form of the whole. It becomes the *universale post rem* by being divided from "matter", i.e., from individualizing conditions (in *De anima* we read of the abstraction of the "common nature"). The active intellect also acts directly upon the potential intellect by "illuminating" and actualizing it. In connection with this, the potential intellect is called (in *De anima*), the "place of intelligibles". When it has received a cognitive form, the potential intellect becomes the "speculative" intellect (Albert borrows this from Averroes' corresponding concept of "the intellect in act"). Beginning in *De anima*, Albert diverges widely on the degree of actualization in the intellect and follows Arab thinkers when he introduces a degree of complete actualization of the intellect, when the intellect becomes the "*intellectus adeptus*", the "acquired" intellect. While the intellect in ontological terms is a "part of the soul", as a faculty of knowledge it is not individual (otherwise knowledge would not have universal value; in this instance Albert is influenced by Averroes' arguments). At the stage of "*intellectus adeptus*", the active intellect becomes the form of the potential intellect, and then it is "acquired." The collaboration of the senses is no longer needed. The intellect has become capable of knowing itself and spiritual beings, and is opened to the light of the intelligences and first causes. It becomes the "*intellectus assimilativus*". This is the state of highest happiness for the soul. Albert calls the *intellectus adeptus* "the root of immortality" (also in his *Summa de mirabili scientia Dei*). Like an angle or an intelligence, the soul is joined with the cosmic order and opened to illumination. It needs to use the collaboration of the sense only before attaining the state of *adeptio intellectus*. The idea that the human intellect is illuminated by a higher light was always present in Albert's thought. Already in his *Commentary on the "Sentences"* (from his period in Paris), he speaks of the fortification of the active intellect by its being connected with the Divine Intellect ("as the light of a star with the light of the sun"). The *De anima* is crowned with a text of neo-Platonic character—

*De intellectu et intelligibili*, just as the *Metaphysics* was crowned with the *Liber de causis* (Albert connects both of these texts in their origin with “a certain letter of Aristotle about the beginning of all being”). All Albert’s arguments on the soul are connected by the thought that the soul is created according to the likeness of God (the philosophical works). The Augustinian motifs are interwoven here with neo-Platonic motifs. Some think (including Gilson) that Albert’s conception of the soul is derived from the idea that the image of God is impressed upon man’s soul.

DOCTRINE CONCERNING NATURE. Albert was the most outstanding investigator of nature over a period of several centuries. His works on nature take in a wide range of topics—anatomy, physiology, medicine, zoology and embryology, botany, mineralogy, and applied knowledge of nature, such as agronomy. He understood the science of animate nature as a subdivision of the philosophy of nature, and therefore he resorts to his philosophical conceptual apparatus, including his conception of the soul, but in a wide range of questions he calls upon empirical investigations (*experimentum*) and uses a descriptive method. Aristotle’s zoological works and the work *De plantis* ascribed to him serve as Albert’s foundation, but Albert also draws widely upon later works (especially upon Galen, and he also cites Avicenna’s *Canon of medicine* in the field of botany). Albert made many corrections and simplified complex passages in others, although he also made mistakes because he did not have the proper tools for research.. His contribution is chiefly in the particular material acquired by his own observation, but also in his approach and methodological reflections. His description of the world of plants and animals remains of interest today. He often uses the ordinary popular names for plants and animals, and he presents abundant synonyms for various species. His attempts to systematize the plant and animal kingdoms are interesting. His systematization is based on the literature he had available, and it is based on the prevalent but often misleading categories. Albert includes man in the world of animals with respect to his body, as the most perfect animal (*animal perfectissimum*). He connected his lecture concerning the formation of the human fetus with the conception of the human soul, which is created by the first cause and is not drawn out of mater by any collection of principles operating in nature, as is the case with the vegetative or sensible soul. The foundation of man’s perfection as a being is his soul, for he is often not equal to beasts in the efficiency of his senses (man does not need to use the senses to the same degree as beasts, since by his soul he rises above the material world). Albert’s knowledge of the human body, its construction and functions, is noteworthy, e.g., his knowledge of the human brain and its connection with man’s psychic life (the localization of the exterior senses). Albert the Great was interested in the connection between a man’s physical features and his abilities and inclinations, but he did not believe in determinism. In order to see the full image of man in Albert’s thought, we should consider besides his conception of the soul what he says as a natural scientist about man’s physical nature.

Albert thought that nature was a worthy object of investigation and knowledge on its own terms. In his research he postulated the necessity of experience (*experimentum*). Some writers emphasize that Albert’s works in natural science marked an important stage in the development of natural science, and he is regarded as the most outstanding investigator of nature from Aristotle up to modern times.

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