To Know the Truth of Things

An Overview of the Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas

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DEDICATION

To the memory of Fr. Vincent Guagliardo, OP, and to all the friars and professors at the Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology in Berkeley, California, who first introduced me to the beauty and depth of the philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas.

CONTENTS

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1

INTRODUCTION TO THE LIFE AND WORK OF SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS

The study of philosophy aims not at knowing what men have thought, but what the truth of things is. — Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's On the Heavens*, Book I, Lecture 22, no. 228.

What is Thomistic Philosophy?

Thomistic Philosophy consists of the philosophical methods and principles used or inspired by Saint Thomas Aquinas (1224/5-1274), a Catholic priest and Dominican friar and theologian, in his explanation and defense of the Christian faith. He was one of the most prolific, profound, and influential thinkers in Western thought, and his influence continues among contemporary philosophers and theologians. Because of this, his writings have become a staple of current philosophy courses, not only in Catholic or Christian schools, but in secular colleges and universities as well. Thus, many professional philosophers and instructors recognize the importance of his thought, even or especially by those who do not share his theistic or Catholic convictions. Aquinas, is undoubtedly most famous for his Five Ways of Proving the Existence of God from his *Summa Theologiae*,

his introduction to and summary of Catholic theology for graduate students in theology at medieval universities, despite the fact that he has other more well-developed proofs for God's existence. A hallmark of his thought, as we will see, is the belief that we can gain access to truth about nature and nature's God using both faith and reason, a conflict between them being impossible since they both originate in Him.

Believing that reason, unaided and independent of religious faith, can, in principle, lead the mind to know the existence of God and something of his nature, Aquinas defended the use of philosophy, especially in the works of Aristotle, as legitimate and beneficial within Catholic theology. In the 13th century in which he lived, this was quite controversial, and the fact that it may not seem so today is a testament to the ultimate positive impact that he had on the Christian Church, and on the wider intellectual world as a whole. This defense of philosophy led him to incorporate philosophical insights beyond those pertaining directly to God, and so what can legitimately be termed the philosophy of Aquinas continues to offer insights into many lingering problems in Metaphysics, the Philosophy of Mind, the Philosophy of Religion, Ethics and Politics.

While few instructors assigning selections of Aquinas's texts such as the Five Ways in philosophy classes would question his influence or the depth of his insights, no one can doubt the prodigious volume of his writings. In about fifty years of life, he wrote over eight million words in over fifty major works on scripture, theology, and philosophy, and in modern printed editions these extend to sixty ponderous volumes. The few selections assigned to students, thus, hardly give a very complete picture of his thought, and can present a very distorted view of it, since they necessarily omit much in the way of presuppositions, context, and background necessary to understand them. This is especially true in the case of the Five Ways where students may not understand or receive instruction on Aquinas's very precise meaning of motion, *per se* cause, perfection, participation, end, and intention. Similarly, students may, and often do, misunderstand Aquinas's doctrines of natural law, intentionality, mental activity, virtue and vice, analogy, or evil among many others purely

philosophical ideas which they may encounter in texts ripped from their context in the totality of his thought. This *Overview of Thomistic Philosophy* will, hopefully, help provide that context, and give a sympathetic explanation of the main points of his overall system of philosophical thought, along with presuppositions and background, as well as some indication of how these are related to his main focus, his theological teaching and doctrine.

As the brief quotation at the beginning of this Introduction indicates, Aquinas did not believe that one properly did or should study philosophy merely to know what the thinkers of the past thought about the topics they discussed, but rather that one studies philosophy in order to know what the truth of things is. This *Overview*, then, aims not just to give a fuller presentation of Aquinas's thought, situating it within historical and conceptual contexts, presuppositions, and background, but also and more importantly, it aims to take Aquinas and his thought as guides to discovering what the truth of things is: what is the fundamental structure of reality, what ultimately is true, what is the true human good, and what is the true ultimate reality.

Who was Saint Thomas Aquinas?

Thomas Aquinas was born in 1224 or 1225 to aristocratic parents, the youngest son of Landulf, Count of Aquino, and Theodora, a noble woman of Naples. At the age of five, he was placed in the Monastery of Monte Cassino, in what is today central Italy, to receive from the monks there an education to prepare the young nobleman for a career in the Church. Because of the promise he showed in his studies and because of the conflict that erupted between the pope (to whom the monastery was subject) and the German emperor (whose vassal Landulf was), at around the age of fourteen he was sent to the University of Naples to continue his education in the Liberal Arts. It was there that he excelled under his new masters and was probably first exposed to the recently rediscovered natural and metaphysical works of Aristotle, the 4th century BC Greek philosopher and proto-scientist. (For more on medieval liberal arts education and the place of Aristotelian philosophy in the university education of the

Middle Ages, see the introductory remarks to Chapter 2 on Logic.) In Naples, the young Thomas also encountered Dominican friars.

The Dominican Order (or the Order of Friars Preachers) is a religious community consisting mostly of priests (i.e., friars, similar to monks, but not bound to any one monastery) within the Christian (Catholic) Church; the order founded by St. Dominic de Guzman (c.1170-1221) after whom it is is named. Dominic was a canon or secular (i.e., diocesan) priest of the Cathedral of Osma in Spain, and he came to establish this order when he and his Bishop, Diego, were on a diplomatic mission for the King of Castile. Passing through the south of France in 1206, the two royal legates witnessed first-hand to what a great extent the lay people of the area had abandoned the Christian faith to follow dualistic and heretical beliefs.

The laity in this area of France at the time received little instruction in the Catholic faith from the clergy, and they had become disaffected by the official Church which was seen as corrupt and part of the ruling establishment. They were, however, eager to follow the Gospel, and so there arose in the 12th century, more or less spontaneously, poor itinerant preachers who claimed to imitate the poverty of Jesus and proclaim his message (called Albigensians because they were centered in the town of Albi).

> Toward the end of the twelfth century and during the early part of the thirteenth, the Albigensians grew in number because of the zeal, evangelical poverty, and intellectual acumen of the leaders, the "Cathari."[1]

Despite initially being generally faithful to the Church, they were looked upon with suspicion by ecclesial authorities. These preachers, often acting without the permission of, and even against, the directives of such authorities, began to drift away from the Christian truth. These preachers and their followers whom Dominic and Diego encountered, for instance, taught that everything good is from God who is Spirit and Goodness, and that whatever is opposed to such goodness (such as the Church

[1] James A. Weisheipl, *Friar Thomas D'Aquino: His Life, Thought, and Work* (Doubleday and Co. 1974), p. 21.

authorities who opposed their preaching) must arise from a power opposed to God. They believed that matter, too, being opposed to Spirit, is evil and must be from the source of evil, i.e., from the Devil, equal in power to God. Likewise, the Catholic Sacraments, since they make use of material things like water, wine, bread, and oil, could not be from God. They also viewed the human body as either worthless, or as evil and a prison for the immortal soul. The sincerity of these austere, but misguided, preachers was turned to political ends by local secular authorities, who, in order to thwart their ecclesiastical rivals, gave support to these heretics.

Dominic and Diego also encountered Cistercian monks whom the pope had sent as missionaries to convert the heretics back to the Catholic faith.

> Numerous delegations of Cistercians and papal legates had been sent into the territory to convert the Albigensians; but these efforts met with little success. Bishop Diego and Dominic both soon realized that the heretics could be won over only by the practice of evangelical poverty, deep learning, and zeal for souls.[2]

Sending home the rest of their retinue, Bishop Diego and Dominic adopted extreme austerity and began preaching the truth that all things, even material things, are good and are created by the only source of creation, God. (One finds this traditional Dominican opposition to Albigensian dualism in Thomas' teaching on God as sole source of creation (e.g., *On the Power of God*, q. 3, a. 5) and in his use of Aristotle's views on body and soul.) Their approach was more successful than the Cistercians had been, and so they totally committed themselves to the task of converting the heretics. Although Bishop Diego died in 1207, Dominic and the rest of the missionaries continued their preaching in the south of France working to restore the faithful of that region to orthodox Catholic faith.

Dominic continued to preach the Christian Gospel despite the fact that civil war broke out in the region. Under pressure from Pope Innocent III, the King of France sent a crusade against the

[22] *Ibid.*

Albigensians who, with the support of the Count of Toulouse, had murdered the papal legate. From 1206 until 1215, Dominic toiled in the south of France in relative obscurity, attracting followers to assist him in his preaching task. In 1216, Dominic received official recognition from the pope, Honorius III, for his community as the Order of Friars Preachers. No sooner had he established an institutional base, however, than St. Dominic sent his brothers in small groups to various centers of learning throughout Europe, even to the medieval world's preeminent educational center, the University of Paris. Dominic believed innovatively in the need for sound preaching for common folk, and that it must arise out of a firm foundation in theology. Accordingly, he sent his brothers to be educated in Christian doctrine and to recruit others so educated. Quickly, the Order of Preachers spread throughout Europe, becoming well established in every institution of higher education.

The young Thomas Aquinas was apparently impressed by the spirit of contemplation and preaching, humility, poverty, and service embodied by the order of Saint Dominic, and in Naples, at about the age of nineteen, he soon joined the preaching friars. Young Thomas's aristocratic family was not pleased with this choice, however, since the poor and itinerant friars were not held in very high esteem. When his mother set out for Naples in order to retrieve Brother Thomas from the clutches of the Dominicans, the friars sent him to Rome, but Thomas was captured by his brothers, knights in the Imperial Army. He was taken to a family castle and imprisoned for over a year as his family tried to dissuade him from carrying through his resolution to continue as a Dominican.

His brothers even sent a prostitute into his cell to tempt him away from vows of religion with carnal pleasures, but Thomas drove her away with a burning brand. As his confessor revealed years later during the processes of canonization by which he would be declared a saint, young Brother Thomas then drew a cross on the wall and knelt in prayer. After acting so to preserve his chastity, he told his confessor that he was visited by angels who bound him with a blessed cincture which preserved him ever after from temptations of lust. While in prison, he continued his study, and

when finally released, he professed his vows in the Order of Friars Preachers.

At the age of twenty, he was placed under the instruction of the Dominican Master of Theology, St. Albert the Great, first in Paris and later in Cologne. Albert was a towering figure in medieval philosophy and theology and had such an encyclopedic knowledge and incisive mind that, even in his lifetime, he was called "the Great." His fellow Dominican and disciple, Ulrich of Strasbourg said of Albert, "He was a man so superior in every science, that he can fittingly be called the wonder of our time."

Albert was born in Swabia in Germany around the year 1200 and studied at the University of Padua where he encountered Dominican friars and entered their order. He went to the University of Paris to continue his studies, received the degree of Master of Theology (equivalent to today's doctorate), and helped to introduce the newly discovered natural, metaphysical, and ethical works of Aristotle into the university curriculum. Albert also established and organized the Dominican House of Studies in Cologne, and is said to have consulted on the construction of that city's impressive gothic cathedral.

Albert had a consuming interest in studying the natural world and conducted much research into various animals, birds, insects, plants, and minerals. It is from these studies that he has been associated with alchemy and even acclaimed (or slandered) as a practitioner of magic and the occult. He, in fact, limited himself mostly to observation and classification, and did much to debunk more fanciful explanations for the workings of nature. Indeed, he wrote, "The aim of natural science is not to simply accept the statements of others, but to investigate the causes that are at work in nature." Albert was elected provincial (superior) of the German province of the Dominican Order and was eventually appointed bishop of Ratisbon (Regensburg) an office he resigned after three years. After the death of Saint Thomas Aquinas in 1274, Albert did much to promote and defend the teaching of his illustrious pupil. Albert himself died in 1280 and was canonized and declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Pius IX in 1931, and proclaimed Patron Saint of natural scientists in 1941.

During his time studying in Germany, Thomas' fellows, because of his large stature and quiet demeanor, teased him with the nickname "Dumb Ox," but St. Albert declared that Thomas' bellows would resound throughout the world. In Cologne, probably at the age of twenty-five, Thomas was ordained to the priesthood.

After a few years, Thomas was sent to Paris to teach his brethren and to earn his own Master of Theology degree from the University there. He became embroiled in a controversy, however, and was delayed in receiving his degree and occupying a place on the faculty. When a student was killed by the Paris guard, a dispute erupted between the University and the city of Paris. The University went on strike, but the Dominicans and Franciscans refused to join in. Consequently, St. Thomas and the Franciscan, St. Bonaventure, were refused their Masters' degrees in Theology. One of the Parisian professors, William of Saint-Amour, even wrote a vicious attack against the friars, *The Perils of the Last Times*. Thomas responded by writing his own defense of the religious orders, *Against Those Attacking the Worship of God and Religion*. Finally, Pope Alexander IV and St. Louis IX, King of France, resolved the dispute, and Thomas and Bonaventure received their degrees.

King Louis, indeed, is said to have been an ardent admirer and supporter of Saint Thomas. Once, when the Dominican friar was invited to dine at the table of the king, Brother Thomas fell silent as the meal and conversation continued around him, becoming lost in thought. Then, suddenly, Thomas exclaimed, "That will settle the Manichees!" The other guests stared aghast at the apparently rude outburst. But the king recognized that the brilliant theologian had been distracted wrestling with some philosophical and theological difficulty, apparently trying to answer those who view the material world as evil and deriving from an evil principle (as Manichees do); this issue, of course, is dear to the heart of Dominicans as the preaching of St. Dominic against just such heretics eventually led him to found the Order of Preachers. King Louis accordingly called for scribes to take down the insight Brother Thomas had come to, lest it be forgotten.

In the fifteen years from 1257-1273, St. Thomas was prolific in his writing, teaching, and preaching. He is said to have been able

to dictate several different treatises to various scribes at once. Far more than most other professors, Aquinas held a remarkable number of scholarly disputations throughout the academic year at the University of Paris. The written texts of these public debates have come down to us as *Disputed Questions* (*Quaestiones Disputatae*), and Aquinas's cover an equally impressive range of topics: *On Truth, On the Power of God, On Evil, On the Soul, On the Cardinal Virtues, On Spiritual Creatures*, among others. In his lifetime he wrote over 50 major works, from original philosophical works, to theological treatises, to commentaries on works of Aristotle and on Scripture. His monumental (yet ultimately unfinished) *Summa Theologiae* is a masterpiece of medieval scholasticism and Catholic theology.

It is helpful to know something of the details of the form and structure of these writings to be able to read his works profitably. As part of the requirements for earning his Master of Theology degree, Thomas Aquinas lectured on and wrote his *Commentary on the Sentences* "a collection of doctrinally central, often difficult texts from Scripture and the Church Fathers, compiled by Peter Lombard (d. 1160)."[3] By Aquinas's time, the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard had become a standard textbook for theology lectures, and commenting on the work was the capstone project for earning the terminal theology degree and license to teach. Aquinas approached this task, however, in a way that departed from the pattern suggested by the text, which Lombard drew from St. Augustine, the 5th century bishop of Hippo (in North Africa), the towering source of much of Catholic theology, as well as from the most important Latin Church Fathers.

> On Aquinas's scheme, things are to be considered according to the pattern of proceeding from God as their source [Trinity, creation, the nature of creatures] and insofar as they return to him as their end [salvation and atonement]. This scheme of

[3] Jan Aertsen, "Aquinas's Philosophy in Its Historical Setting," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, edited by Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 16.

> *exitus* and *reditus* is derived from Neoplatonism and plays a fundamental role in Aquinas's thought.[4]

The circular theme of creatures exiting from God in love and likewise returning to him recurs in many places in Aquinas's theological writings, especially in the later of his two great theological syntheses already mentioned, the *Summa Theologiae (ST* or *Summa)*. (His other monumental synthesis is the *Summa contra Gentiles*, "written for Dominican missionaries in the Moslem world to make 'the truth of Catholic faith' manifest to those who hold beliefs opposed to it.")[5] Aquinas follows the general *exitus/reditus* pattern for the *Summa's* three parts:

1. The First Part (*ST* I) is the *exitus*: from God as One and Triune, to creatures, angels, and humans;
2. The Second Part begins the *reditus* for humans with Aquinas's treatment of the moral life, and it has two parts (unimaginatively labeled the First Part of the Second Part (*ST* I-II) and Second Part of the Second Part (*ST* II-II));
3. Finally, the Third Part (*ST* III) completes the *reditus* with Christ and the Church and her Sacraments.

Additionally, the *ST* text follows the pattern of the public disputed questions and arranges topics according to general Questions, under which are Articles, subtopics posed in the form of a yes or no question, e.g., Does God exist? (*ST* I, q. 2, a. 3) (which contains his famous "Five Ways" of proving that God does). Each article "consists of four parts that begin with fixed formulas:

1. "It seems it is not so" (*Videtur quod non*) [There may be several of these, commonly called "Objections" enumerated as Objection 1, Objection 2, etc.]
2. "On the contrary" (*Sed contra*) [Usually one, sometimes two, brief citations of authorities in support of the opposite view, the one Aquinas will argue for. For more on the *Sed contra*, see below.]

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

3. "I reply that it must be said that" (*Respondeo dicendum quod*) [Often called the response or "body" (*corpus*) of the article, this is the longest part and contains Aquinas's arguments for his answer to the question. Often, his response is not a simple yes or no, but distinguishes what may be yes in a certain respect (*secundum quid*) from no (or yes) absolutely (*simpliciter*). It is a common, though difficult to source, dictum characteristic of Thomas Aquinas's thought that *one should never deny, seldom affirm, but always distinguish*.]
4. Finally, Aquinas offers rejoinders to the objections that were raised at the beginning." [These are commonly call "Reply to Objection 1, 2, etc."][6]

In addition to academic philosophical and theological works, he also wrote poetry in praise of the Eucharist which is still used by the Catholic Church today. Saint Thomas was assigned to the Dominican convent in Orvieto in 1263, while the papal court was also in residence in the central Italian city, when a remarkable Eucharistic miracle occurred. A German priest, Peter of Prague, while on pilgrimage to Rome, stopped in the town of Bolsena to celebrate Mass in the Basilica there. Harboring doubts about the reality of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, Peter saw the Host miraculously transformed into flesh and blood as he said the words of consecration, blood staining the altar linens of his Mass. The evidence of this miracle was brought for inspection to Pope Urban IV in nearby Orvieto, and as a result, the Roman pontiff commissioned St. Thomas to compose the prayers for Mass and the Divine Office to celebrate the feast of the Most Holy Body of the Lord (*Corpus Christi*) which the pope instituted the following year.

Here is a small but beautiful part of the liturgy St. Thomas composed:

> O precious and wonderful banquet that brings us salvation and contains all sweetness! … Yet, in the end, no one can fully express the sweetness of this sacrament, in which spiritual delight is tasted at its very source, and in which we renew the

[6] *Ibid.* p 18-19.

> memory of that surpassing love for us which Christ revealed in his passion. It was to impress the vastness of this love more firmly upon the hearts of the faithful that our Lord instituted this sacrament at the Last Supper.[7]

Saint Thomas traveled tirelessly around Europe, being called upon alternately by the Papal court and by his Order to teach in Anagni and Orvieto, then in Rome, then in Viterbo.

He was called back to Paris in 1269, however, to help quell another controversy there over the use of Aristotle's texts and ideas by Christian scholars. Siger of Brabant, a professor on the Faculty of Arts (undergraduate philosophy), had asserted (following the Muslim philosopher Averroes (Ibn Rushd)) that Aristotle proves that there is one separate intellect for all human persons (and so denying a basis for the immortality of each individual person's soul), that the world is eternal (and not created a finite time ago as taught in Scripture in *Genesis*), and that God (in being Self-Thinking Thought) was unaware of the world He causes. Siger and his fellow Heterodox Aristotelians or Latin Averroists, as they came to be called, were even accused of, and condemned for, asserting that there were two truths, one derived from faith and another, contradictory one derived from reason.

> Because of the patent incompatibility of certain positions of Averroistic Aristotelianism with the Christian faith (such as the theory of the eternity of the world), some masters of the faculty of arts in thirteenth century Paris developed the theory of double truth: what is established in sacred theology sometimes contradicts what is true in philosophy, so that a Christian philosopher must accept simultaneously two conflicting theses. However, Aquinas strongly opposes this view. Since all truth comes from God, in whom there is no contradiction, such a position is impossible. Apparent contradictions originate from erroneous reasoning or from false deductions from the doctrine of the faith.[8]

[7] *Opusculum 57, in festo Corporis Christi.*

[8] Leo J Elders, SVD, "Faith and Reason: The Synthesis of St. Thomas Aquinas," *Nova et Vetera,* English Edition, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2010), pp.

Concerned with the threat to the Christian faith posed by these positions and the distortion of Aristotle's views, as well as the disrepute they cast on the teaching of the ancient Greek's works, Thomas wrote *On the Unity of the Intellect against the Averroists* and *On the Eternity of the World against the Murmurers*, arguing that such positions cannot be supported by reason, nor are they accurate representations of Aristotle's positions.

Finally, in 1272, he was appointed head of the faculty of theology at the University of Naples. On 6 December 1273, however, he abruptly stopped writing. When his secretary asked him why, Saint Thomas said he had had a vision of God or heaven, after which it seemed to him that all he had written was as straw. (To us not granted such an experience, his writings are nevertheless quite valuable.)

Saint Thomas did not live long after this episode, however. Having been called by Pope Gregory X to attend the Council of Lyons also on the very same day, Thomas traveled as far as Terracina in Central Italy, not far from his family's estates, before collapsing, possibly striking his head on a low-hanging tree branch. He was first brought to Maenza, to the castle of his niece, Francesca, but he requested to be brought to the nearby Cistercian Monastery of Fossanova, so he might die assisted by the prayers of monks; he lingered there for a month or more. As G. K. Chesterton notes,

> It may be worth remarking, for those who think that he thought too little of the emotional or romantic side of religious truth, that he asked to have *The Song of Solomon* read through to him from beginning to end.[9]

The Song of Solomon (or *The Song of Songs* (*Canticum Canticorum*)) is a collection of love poems in the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament having allegorical meaning as declarations of affection, desire, and joy between God and His people Israel; for Christians, these are fulfilled in the marriage of Jesus Christ to His Bride, the Church. *The Song of Songs* may perhaps have been on Saint

527–52.

[9] *Saint Thomas Aquinas, The Dumb Ox* (Image Books 2014), p. 118.

Thomas's mind toward the end of his life. In a late work, *Compendium of Theology*, possibly composed close to when Saint Thomas stopped writing, he refers to the permanent grasp of lovers in discussing the joy of heaven.

> When we see [God] by direct vision [in heaven] we shall hold Him present within ourselves. Thus in *The Song of Songs* 3:4, the spouse seeks him whom her soul loves; and when at last she finds him she says: "I held him, and I will not let him go."[10]

Saint Thomas died among Cistercian monks on 7 March 1274 at the age of about 50.

Thomas Aquinas was canonized by Pope John XXII on 18 July 1323, and Pope Saint Pius V proclaimed Saint Thomas a Doctor of the Church (the Angelic Doctor) in 1567. Pope Leo XIII, in the Encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, recommended the study of Saint Thomas as the model and norm of Christian philosophy. This last endorsement helped to inaugurate the Thomistic revival of the twentieth century that continues now into the twenty-first.

* * *

What Is the Relation between Philosophy and Theology in the Thought of Aquinas?

Since this *Overview of the Philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas* seeks to present "the philosophical methods and principles used or inspired by Aquinas in his explanation of the Catholic faith," it would be well to consider whether and how there might be such a thing as philosophy discoverable within the work of a Catholic theologian. More generally, one must wonder whether a Christian philosophy is even possible, or does the fact that the thought is Christian, and thus dependent on Christian revelation, vitiate its philosophical character as a purely rational enterprise. This charge is typically leveled against medieval thinkers, but especially Thomas Aquinas and those in the Thomistic tradition. It is a serious charge - one that should be handled soberly and fairly by anyone claiming that his or her philosophy is truly rational knowledge and also truly Christian. What follows is a brief exploration of the problem as it

[10] *Compendium of Theology*, Book II, Chapter 9, par. 23.

is dealt with by prominent historians of theology and philosophy, and Thomists of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Faith and Philosophy

There are in fact two difficulties connected with identifying the philosophy of a believing Christian such as Thomas Aquinas. On the one hand, the Christian may wonder whether the use of philosophy somehow undercuts the authenticity of faith or makes faith superfluous. For if philosophy can prove that God exists, for instance, one need not, indeed it seems, that one cannot, believe (with religious faith) that He exists, since according to the classic definition of Christian faith in the Biblical text *Hebrews* 11:1, "faith is the substance (or realization (Greek: *hypostasis*)) of things to be hoped for, the evidence (or proof (Greek: *elenchos*)) of things not seen." On the other hand, for the non-Christian, the worry is that the Christian does not admit philosophical conclusions that conflict with his or her faith, but preselects a philosophy and principles that result in "conclusions" compatible with what he or she already believes, such as the existence of God and the immortality of the human soul. Indeed, the theological context of Aquinas's use of philosophy, it must be acknowledged, is essential to understanding it and his use of it.

> Any appropriate formulation [of the question how Aquinas's philosophy is related his theology] must begin by recognizing that whatever philosophy there is in Aquinas can be approached only through his theology if it is to be approached as he intended it. Indeed, it is very difficult to separate out the philosophical passages in his works. His writings are overwhelmingly on the topics and in the genres of the medieval faculties of theology. He wrote almost always in what is self-evidently the voice of a theologian.[11]

Thus, the worry is that whatever philosophical arguments a thinker such as Thomas Aquinas produces, precisely because he was a professional theologian and, for the most part, they occur in

[11] Mark Jordan, "Theology and Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, p.232.

theological works, they are tainted by the Christian presuppositions and assumptions he is committed to based on his faith, undermining their rational reliability. By producing or adducing only such philosophical arguments as conform to one's religious beliefs and only admitting "the correct answers," the Christian runs the risk of producing bad arguments.

> Knowing the correct answers in advance is, of course, not a substitute for knowing them through a logical argument based on experience. Unfortunately, having the answers can lead to intellectual laziness. Catholic thinkers must fight the temptation to be satisfied with shoddy arguments when the conclusions of these arguments happen to coincide with what is known with certitude through faith. Indeed, Christian philosophers should rather be doubly careful about their reasoning, for if they offer feeble philosophical arguments in defense of something they know to be true through faith, when a keener thinker comes along and demolishes these arguments, it tends to discredit the truth of the faith.[12]

Such shoddy arguments put forward by Christian philosophers is bad both for philosophy and for the Christian faith out of which it arises and which it is meant to support or defend. But, one may wonder, need the arguments of a Christian philosopher be deficient in this regard?

Nature and Grace

Throughout his career, Thomas Aquinas was concerned with these questions, though, to be fair, he was more concerned with justifying how to incorporate secular, pagan philosophy (mostly that of Aristotle) into Christian theology, which he consistently refers to as Sacred Doctrine (*Sacra Doctrina*, in Latin). Yet, his concern was also with defending genuine philosophy based on, as

[12] Marie I. George, "Trust Me. Why Should I? Aquinas on Faith and Reason," in *The Ever-Illuminating Wisdom of St. Thomas Aquinas: Papers Presented at a Conference Sponsored by the Wethersfield Institute* (Ignatius Press 1999), p. 48. See also Msgr. William T. Magee, "The Situation: Seminary Education and its Critics," in *Christian Philosophy in the College and Seminary*, edited by George McLean, (CUA Press 1966), pp. 86-92.

he says, the light of natural reason, not some pseudo-reasoning which is really religious beliefs in rational disguise. His earliest treatment of the subject occurs in his *Commentary on Boethius's On the Trinity*, which he wrote around the time he was completing the requirements to become a Master of Theology in finalizing his *Commentary on the Sentence* of Peter Lombard (which we will also consider below). It seems likely he wrote these early works in 1256 while he was sidelined by the disputes at the University of Paris which were ultimately resolved in Aquinas and Bonaventure's favor by the Pope Alexander IV and King Louis IX (see above).[13]

Aquinas presents several elements of his program of integrating the two disciplines that respects the distinction and autonomy of each, though obviously favoring theology and his Christian faith. Perhaps, most importantly, is his insistence that grace does not destroy nature, but presupposes and builds upon (restores, perfects, and elevates) nature.

> Indeed, grace is not meant to do away with human nature, but to raise and perfect it. Grace renders nature more perfect. It does so in agreement with nature's basic characteristics.[14]

In this, Aquinas's position is opposed to the view that human nature and reason are inherently evil or irredeemably corrupt, and fundamentally opposed to grace and faith. It is useful, then, to consider his whole answer in Question 2, Article 3 of his commentary on Boethius's work:

> **I answer that it must be said that** gifts of grace are added to those of nature in such a way that they do not destroy them, but rather perfect them; thus, even the light of faith, which is infused in us by grace, does not destroy the natural light of reason, given to us from God. And even though the natural light of the human mind is insufficient for the discovery of those truths revealed through faith, nevertheless it is impossible that those truths divinely handed on to us by faith should be contrary to what we are endowed with by nature. One of these

[13] Thomas Aquinas, *Faith, Reason, and Theology*, translated by Armand Maurer, (Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto 1987) p. vii.
[14] Elders, *art. cit.*, p. 530.

> would have to be false, but since we have both from God, God would be the author of our error, which is impossible. Rather, since in imperfect things there is found some likeness to the perfect, in those things known by natural reason there are certain likenesses to what is taught by faith.
>
> Now, just as Sacred Doctrine is founded upon the light of faith, so philosophy depends upon the light of natural reason. Thus, it is impossible that things belonging to philosophy be contrary to things belonging to faith; even though they fall short of them. Nevertheless, they contain some likenesses to the latter, and a certain preparation (*preambula*) for them, just as nature is a preparation (*preambula*) for grace.
>
> If, however, anything is found in the teachings of the philosophers contrary to faith, this does not belong to philosophy, but rather to an abuse of philosophy arising from a defect of reason. And so, it is possible from the principles of philosophy to refute an error of this sort, either by showing it is altogether impossible, or is not necessary. For just as those things which belong to faith cannot be demonstratively proved, so certain things contrary to them cannot be shown demonstratively to be false. But it can be shown they are not necessary.
>
> Thus, in Sacred Doctrine we are able to make a threefold use of philosophy:
>
> 1. First, to demonstrate what are preambles of faith, which it is necessary for faith to know, such as the truths about God that can be proved by natural reason: that God exists, that God is one, and other such truths about God or creatures proved in philosophy which faith presupposes.
> 2. Second, to better understand what belongs to the faith through certain likenesses, as Augustine in his book, *On the Trinity*, uses many comparisons taken from the teachings of philosophers to elucidate the Trinity.

3. Third, to resist those who speak against the faith, either by showing that their statements are false, or by showing that they are not necessarily true.

Nevertheless, those using philosophy in Sacred Doctrine can err in two ways:

1. In one way, by using teachings contrary to faith, which do not belong to philosophy, but are the corruption and abuse of it, as Origen did.
2. In another way, by limiting what belongs to faith within the bounds of philosophy, as if one should be unwilling to believe anything except what could be established by philosophy. On the contrary, philosophy should be brought within the bounds of faith, according to the saying of the Apostle, "bringing into captivity every understanding unto the obedience of Christ" (2 *Cor*. 10:5).

Mark Jordan notes that for Aquinas this means undertaking philosophy for Christian purposes:

> Philosophical inquiries ought always to serve a theological end. Applied to texts, this rule would seem to require that philosophical argumentation be begun and carried forward only from the believer's motive of the twofold love of God and neighbor.[15]

To these points, Aquinas adds in his Reply to Objection 5, "Wherefore those who use philosophical doctrines in Sacred Doctrine in service to the faith, do not mix water with wine, but change water into wine." We will examine the import of this Biblical analogy in the context of Aquinas's mature thought below.

For now, it is enough to note that Aquinas, even in this very early work, sees the value and autonomy of philosophy originating, like grace and faith, in God, Who is, as Aquinas will later teach, Truth Itself.[16] Philosophy, then, is useful to theology if, and only if, it is true, and just to the extent it is true. If a proposition is false,

[15] Jordan, *art. cit.*, 236.
[16] *ST* I, q. 16, a. 5.

Aquinas writes, it is not philosophy, nor the product of natural reason, but an abuse of these.

> Thomas vindicates the autonomy of philosophy, while in theology he uses without any hesitation many philosophical concepts, definitions, principles, and analyses, which he recognizes as true. His certitude concerning their truth is based on their intrinsic evidence and on their astonishing harmony with the doctrine of faith.[17]

A teaching's truth is its guarantee that it originates in God, and so he is confident that it must be compatible with faith. And since divine grace guarantees that faith and revelation are true, what conflicts with faith cannot be, nor can it truly (pun intended) be philosophy.

By the same token, Aquinas argues, it belongs to philosophy as an exercise in natural reasoning to discover the error in arguments opposed to the faith and correct them, or at least show that the conclusion is not necessary. During his second Paris tenure which began in 1269, Aquinas engaged in these sorts of philosophical exercises to show that Latin Averroist positions mentioned before - all people having a common intellect - are false and not what Aristotle taught. Similarly, Aquinas argues philosophically that the eternity of the world, which Aristotle did teach, is not a necessary conclusion. He does not try to prove, however, that the universe had a beginning in time, as he believed that that could only be known because God reveals it in Scripture. Both erroneous positions relate to matters of faith in challenging the possibility of life after death and the truth and reliability of Scripture. They also challenge the reputation of Aristotle as a reliable teacher of true philosophy, which Aquinas was likewise eager to defend.

Late in his career, Thomas again returns to the distinction and relation between philosophy and theology in the very first question of the *Summa Theologiae*, where he explains the nature and method of Sacred Doctrine (*Sacra Doctrina*), his term for Christian theology (which, as we will see below, seems to include, but extends beyond Sacred Scripture, i.e., the official, public revelation contained in the

[17] Elders, *art. cit.*, p. 540.

Bible). His very first article of this question asks "Whether it is necessary to have any doctrine besides philosophy?" Thomas is more concerned with the first of the two concerns about philosophy in the works of a Christian theologian, i.e., whether the use of philosophy within theology takes anything away from theology's reliance on faith in Scripture, but his treatment of the relationship between the two sciences gives cogent reasons for how and why Christian philosophy, Thomistic philosophy in particular, is legitimately rational and natural (and not inherently religious or supernatural) when considered apart from its admittedly Christian context.

In this first article of the first question of the *Summa*, Thomas Aquinas give a more complete delineation of the difference between philosophy and theology. The article asks whether there is a need for any knowledge beyond philosophy since it investigates everything that exists, even God. Aquinas writes that there is such a need, first because union with God is the goal of human life, and this goal is beyond what reason can grasp (or unaided human effort can achieve), But in order to do what is necessary to attain the goal, people must at least know what it is. "Hence it was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation." So, theology teaches truths about God and how to achieve salvation which no one could discover by natural reason alone, unless God revealed them, and as Aquinas will state later (in Article 8, Reply to Objection 2) people accept this revelation in faith. Secondly, while reason can know some things about God through philosophy, this only happens with difficulty. "[T]he truth about God such as reason could discover, would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors." So, God revealed even naturally discoverable truths to allow people to receive salvation "more fittingly and more surely" (*et convenientius et certius*). He sets the stage, as it were, for his own explanation of how theology contains such naturally knowable truths about God without taking away from faith, and how such philosophical knowledge does not depend on the revelation and faith that characterizes theology. But Aquinas, in his Reply to Objection 2 makes clear, that each intellectual pursuit operates by

different lights, i.e., principles and cognitive focus: "philosophical disciplines teach about those things knowable by the light of natural reason that another science (i.e., theology) teaches according as they are known by the light of divine revelation."

What Scripture Teaches about Philosophy

Some historians argue that Thomas Aquinas's inclusion of philosophy in his works, especially the *Summa Theologiae*, is wholly and completely theological. Jaroslav Pelikan, for instance, in the third volume of his series, *The Christian Tradition: a history of the development of doctrine* contends that Aquinas the theologian employs arguments from natural reason because Christian Scripture indicates that unaided human reason can attain such knowledge of God. In particular, because Scripture reveals God's self-definition "I am who am" (*Exodus* 3:14) and that "the invisible things of God are clearly seen, being understood through the things that have been made" (*Romans* I: 20), Aquinas, according to Pelikan, includes philosophical demonstrations as part of his theological works.

> That self-definition from *Exodus* 3:14, in combination with the standard proof text for natural theology from *Romans* I: 20, provided Thomas Aquinas with the necessary biblical support for undertaking to prove the existence of God by reason. Hence it was by the authority of revelation that the theologian proceeded to argue even apart from revelation that God could be known from his creation.[18]

Thus, since Scripture says that reason can know the existence of God, the theologian, Aquinas in this case, tries to show the correctness of scripture by actually producing at least one (or five in the *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3) proof of God's existence.

> The equation of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with the first principle of being permitted the theologian, charged as he was with the task of expounding the doctrinal tradition, to engage also in the philosophical enterprise of measuring the

[18] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)* (University of Chicago Press 1978), 289.

> capacity of reason to establish the truth of the divine being; and in this sense he was obliged to state a natural theology.[19]

According to Pelikan, the reason Aquinas includes philosophy in a work of theology is that Scripture indicates that reason is sufficient to reach God. Moreover, this indication by Scripture is truly theological since it implies something about the state of man after the Fall of Adam and Eve in the Original Sin. The theologian thus directs the philosopher to do something that theology says is within the power of unaided reason.

Evidently Pelikan takes the "On the contrary" (*sed contras*) sections of articles 2-3 of question 2 as Aquinas stating his magisterial and explicit reason for the inclusion of philosophy in the *Summa*. Thus, in determining that the existence of God can be demonstrated, the *sed contra* of q. 2, a. 2 cites *Romans* I, 20, and as a prelude to the Five Ways in a. 3, that *sed contra* cites *Exodus*. However, not many of those familiar with the *Summa Theologiae* or the medieval *quaestio disputata* format would give as much weight to *sed contras* as to arguments for the author's own position. They merely give an indication that the objections are off target.

> Since this part (*sed contra*) of the development almost always prefigures Aquinas's reasoned reply, it is often meager in itself, simply reminding the reader that there are good reasons for taking the other side seriously.[20]

More importantly, Pelikan's argument fundamentally undermines the autonomy of philosophy even while being incorporated into a summary of theology. For if the theologian such as Aquinas accepts on faith and as his starting point the claim that the existence of God can be proved rationally, then he is giving to a supposedly philosophical proof a conclusion known through faith. Furthermore, he is making the assertion that the proof will successfully pass from premises to its conclusion and makes this assertion on the basis of faith. However, Aquinas, as we will examine more closely, in later articles of Question 1 writes that it is not the job of the theologian to give to philosophy either its

[19] *Ibid.*

[20] Aertsen, *art. cit.* pp. 18-19.

premises or its conclusion. "Therefore, it does not pertain to [theology] to prove the principles of other sciences, but only to judge them."[21] Rather, as we will see below, Aquinas tells us that theology uses philosophy as a handmaid, formally incorporating it into itself, it is ture, yet leaving the independence of its principles and natural light intact.[22] It seems that in order to maintain truly natural knowledge of God within a theology that takes its principles from revelation, there must be another way it is integrated than how Pelikan suggests.

Moment of Discovery and Moment of Truth

John Wippel claims that philosophy in a Christian thinker's theology may maintain its freedom from theological absorption and so be useful to the non-Christian, by identifying a rationally safe influence theology might exert on a Christian's philosophy while also recognizing that philosophy as truly Christian. Wippel distinguishes two moments in a Christian's philosophical journey, the "moment of discovery" and "the moment of proof." The moment of discovery occurs when the philosopher is presented with, or presents to him- or herself, some aspect of reality to investigate. The moment of proof comes when one has reached a demonstrative conclusion as the result of syllogistic reasoning. The moment of proof is strictly philosophic both in its form and content, for what it knows is learned or demonstrated by unaided, natural reason using purely rational principles. The moment of discovery, however, as merely considering which truths one believes might be susceptible of rational investigation, is philosophic in content, albeit not systematized or tested; i.e., it is not philosophic in form.

As Wippel uses the distinction, the influence of faith upon philosophy is intrinsic in its moment of discovery and extrinsic in its moment of proof. Christian philosophy, that of Aquinas or of other medieval theologians more generally, then, could have been influenced by faith and revelation in its moment of discovery. Wippel readily grants "that a typical Christian medieval thinker was

[21] A. 6 Reply to Objection 2.

[22] A. 5 Reply to Objection 2.

influenced in his original acceptance of a given point by his prior religious belief in the same, or in what might be called the 'moment of discovery.'"[23] In contrast to Pelikan who says the Christian philosopher accepts the revelation of Scripture that God's existence can be proved (e.g., *Romans* I, 20), Wippel views the Christian philosopher as a philosopher who considers whether what he believes as a Christian as supernaturally revealed, can also be known rationally.

> In its moment of proof, however, the philosopher proceeds from principles known to reason alone. Such a medieval thinker could never, of course, admit a revealed premise into his attempted philosophic demonstration of a given conclusion without thereby passing from philosophy to theology. One should not, therefore, refer to philosophy as Christian in its "moment of proof."[24]

Wippel thus does not consider philosophy in the moment of proof as susceptible to the being called "Christian." The relationship of faith to philosophy in this moment of the philosophical enterprise is entirely extrinsic.

This view acknowledges some point of content between the Christian faith of the one philosophizing, and it attempts to shield the ensuing exercise of natural reason from it. In so doing, it also diminishes the content of the Christian philosopher's store of religious beliefs, since Aquinas is explicit that one and the same person cannot both believe with religious faith the same truth that one knows as rationally demonstrated.[25] Of course, Aquinas does allow that what one person may know by demonstration, another may believe with faith.[26]

Wippel, of course, acknowledges Aquinas's position on this,[27] yet seems to consider that what is impossible is only that the same

[23] John Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and the Problem of Christian Philosophy," in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (Catholic University Press 1984), p. 23.
[24] *Ibid*., pp. 23-4.
[25] *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 5.
[26] *Ibid*., Reply to Objection 3.
[27] Wippel, *op. cit.,* pp. 3-4.

truth being both known through reason and believed through faith in the same temporal moment, i.e., "that one cannot believe and know the same thing *at the same time*."[28] One may, it seems, first believe, e.g., that God exists as part of His revelation, and later, come to know the same truth on the basis of rational argument. Indeed, this seems to be the procedure Aquinas envisions for those few Christians who are able to successfully prove God's existence.

Thus, the moment of discovery does seem to amount to willing suspension of religious belief, but it occurs as an interruption in the subjective life of believing for the Christian philosopher. Nevertheless, when the proof is complete, and what was once believed has become a conclusion of philosophy, the Christian no longer believes with religious faith that tenet, but sees it as true, and knows it rationally. It should be noted that this contracting of belief by proof only applies to preambles to faith, which Aquinas mentioned in his *Commentary on Boethius's On the Trinity* that few, if any, Christians would actually come to know, and only late in life and with great difficulty or uncertainty.[29] As such, they are not central or essential tenets of the Christian faith, but what must be accepted as true in order to accept what is essential. "Those things that can be known through natural reason, granted that not all will arrive at such knowledge, pertain to the faith only in a qualified way."[30] However, Aquinas allows that engaging in this exercise of proving what one believes may render a person's faith more valuable (meritorious) if "he loves the truth which he believes, he thinks on it and relishes in finding possible reasons for it," but if done as a condition of believing other articles of faith, it renders that faith less valuable or meritorious.[31]

On the other hand, Aquinas describes how it is possible for different sciences to know a single truth both philosophically and theologically and likens this situation to knowing the same physical fact through different natural sciences or by different rational perspectives. As we noted before, Aquinas teaches that philosophy

[28] *Ibid*., p. 4, fn. 8, emphasis mine.
[29] See also *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 4 and *ST*, q. 1, a. 1 below.
[30] George, *art. cit.,* p. 40. Cf. *Commentary on the Sentences*, Bk. III, d. 24, a. 2, sol. 2.
[31] *ST* II-II, q. 2, a. 10 and Replies to Objections 1 and 2.

and theology are distinguished by having different intellectual lights, i.e., principles and subject matters. He says, however, that they may each know the same truths in differing manners, as other purely natural sciences do.

> Sciences are differentiated according to the different ways that things are knowable. For the astronomer and the physicist both may prove the same conclusion, for instance that the earth is round: the astronomer by means of mathematics, i.e., abstracting from matter, and the physicist by means of matter itself. Hence nothing prevents the things which philosophical disciplines teach by the light of natural reason being the same as what another science [theology] teaches according as they are known by the light of divine revelation.[32]

Clearly, Aquinas is writing about these various sciences in general as organized bodies of knowledge, but what he teaches here would seem to apply to the sciences as habits of knowing in the souls of practitioners of these disciplines. So, just as one and the same thinker can engage in both sciences of astronomy and physics, and thus know the truth that the earth is a sphere mathematically and materially (through the shadow the earth casts during a lunar eclipse[33]), though admittedly not at the same time, so too, one single thinker can know philosophically that God exists and believe the same on the basis of revelation. Étienne Gilson, whose views we will examine in more detail below, seemed convinced that Aquinas would admit as much, based on what people are bound to believe for salvation. "According to Thomas Aquinas, everybody is held explicitly and always to believe that God is, and that he aims at the good of man."[34] Gilson then cites

[32] *ST* I, q. 1, a. 1, Reply to Objection 2.
[33] "The sphericity of the earth is most readily seen in the eclipse of the moon, when the earth comes between the sun, the source of light, and the moon, upon which the shadow of the earth is cast." James A. Weisheipl, "The Commentary of St. Thomas on the *De caelo* of Aristotle," in *Thomas Aquinas: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by Brian Davies (Oxford University Press, 2002), p.53.
[34] Étienne Gilson, "What is Christian philosophy?" in *A Gilson Reader*, edited by A. Pegis, (Image Books 1957) pp. 181-82, and p.190, n 4.

Aquinas in *Disputed Question on Truth*, q.14, a. 11: "Therefore, everyone in every age is bound explicitly to believe that God exists and has providence over human affairs." Thus, this obligation would continue to apply to the Christian philosopher who has proven rationally (to himself, at least) that God exists and cares for human affairs. Wippel comments:

> Gilson observes that "there is no reason to think that Thomas is rejecting his other thesis that one cannot believe and know the same thing at the same time." ... As Gilson sees it, God's existence must be accepted on faith by those who have not yet attained to demonstrative knowledge of it. … Then he goes on to suggest that it might be compatible with Thomistic teaching to say that in one sense the existence of God as known by us is not identical with the existence of God as believed by us. … For the affirmation of God by faith is specifically distinct from the affirmation of God by philosophical reason. Belief in God is the first real grasp of that God who is the author of the economy of salvation and the first step on the path leading to man's ultimate supernatural end in the beatific vision.[35]

In this vein, George writes, "Aquinas acknowledges that it can be known through natural reason that divine providence governed the world. Still, a person who did know this could believe in the providence of God as revealed by the faith."[36] Gilson, Wippel, and George all seem to suggest that one and the same person *can*, in respect of the preambles to faith, both know by rational demonstration that God exists and is provident of the human race, on the one hand, and believe with religious faith these same truths because, as grace builds on nature, so faith in supernatural revelation adds the perspective that our happiness will be found in knowing and loving Him in heaven, and that attaining this ultimate end, or even becoming aware of it, is beyond man's natural ability.[37]

For Aquinas, it seems after all, that the Christian need not suspend one's faith while considering, or indeed proving, some

[35] Wippel, *op. cit.,* p. 4, fn. 8.
[36] George, *art. cit.*, p. 56, fn. 57.
[37] Cf. *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 7.

religious tenets in philosophy, since the cognition of the same truth takes on different forms as the mind knows it in two different ways, by two different 'lights.' Furthermore, while as a Christian, such a philosopher has believed and continues to believe on the basis of faith such a tenet, she may know rationally that the argument is sound: that its premises are true, and its form is valid. There is no reason to believe that a Christian's ability to fairly evaluate philosophical arguments would be affected at all by her faith, and this ability can and should be applied to arguments about any philosophical topic whatsoever.

Whether Aquinas truly or consistently taught that belief is restricted by proof only applies to the preambles to faith. Aquinas presents much more philosophy in his theological works than proofs for God's existence, even though this is what he is most known for.

Wippel ultimately contends that there really should not be any question that Aquinas wrote genuine philosophy on the basis of natural, rational argumentation in his small works (opuscula) on natural and metaphysical subjects: *On the Principles of Nature*, *On Being and Essence*, *Commentary on the Book of Causes* among others, as well as commentaries on many of Aristotle's natural works. As such, there is no question that even the non-Christian may benefit philosophically from these works of Aquinas.

> [T]he philosophical opuscula are surely philosophical works. Moreover, they are important sources for Thomas's personal philosophical views. Granted that the *De ente*, [*On Being and Essence*] for instance, is an early work, one already finds therein many of the essential features of the mature Thomistic metaphysics.[38]

Moreover, even explicitly theological treatises contain extended passages of a purely natural, rational nature.

> To the extent that these are self-contained philosophical discussions, one can free them from the theological context and the biblical and patristic references found in their *videturs* and *sed contras* and use them as valuable sources for Thomas's

[38] Wippel, *op. cit.*, 26.

> thought. … In sum, therefore, it would seem that any and all of Thomas's writings, to the extent that clearly employ metaphysical argumentation, may be regarded as legitimate sources for recovering his metaphysical [i.e., purely philosophical] thought.[39]

Moreover, the subjective, epistemological status of the individual Christian's beliefs is not what is at issue, but the lights by which two different disciplines proceed. What these two lights are, and how one, theology, may make use of the other, philosophy, without overwhelming it or undermining its rational independence remains to be seen. The only real question is how might explicitly Christian theological works, such as the *Summa Theologiae* and *Summa contra Gentiles*, present and contain truly philosophical insights and arguments that do not depend on the revelation that is fundamental to Aquinas's whole enterprise in writing these works, while remaining true to his intent and self-understanding as a Christian theologian.

Revealed and Revealable

In the first chapter of *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, Étienne Gilson claims that there is in the theological works of Aquinas a true Christian philosophy that has an intrinsic relationship to faith and revelation beyond being related extrinsically, as facilitating religious belief by giving a non-believer rational evidence that Christianity is true, or as corrective of philosophical errors by removing obstacles to faith which allege to "prove" Christianity must be false.

> This effort of truth believed to transform itself into truth known, is truly the life of Christian wisdom, and the body of rational truths resulting from the effort is Christian philosophy itself. Thus the content of Christian philosophy is that body of rational truths discovered, explored or simply safeguarded, thanks to the help reason receives from revelation.[40]

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 28-29.
[40] Étienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, (University of Notre Dame Press 1994), p. 35.

The Christian philosopher asks "whether among those propositions which by faith he believes to be true, there are not a certain number which reason may know to be true."[41] The discovery of what reason can know in and among what faith believes is the birth of Christian philosophy. When the Christian finds among the truths of his faith

> …some that are capable of becoming objects of science then he becomes a philosopher, and if it is to the Christian faith that he owes this new philosophic insight, he becomes a Christian philosopher.[42]

The insight provided by faith, then, seems to consist in making available for rational discovery what is susceptible of philosophical investigation in the content of the faith. For Gilson, Aquinas so engages in genuine philosophical arguments proceeding by natural reason, not faith and revelation, wherein the faith of the one considering philosophical arguments need not, nor ever is, suspended. For Aquinas, Gilson argues, philosophy is intrinsically incorporated into his genuinely theological writings because it is virtually or potentially contained within Scripture and revelation (received in faith) which defines the content and method of theology. As Aquinas writes,

> Therefore, because Sacred Scripture considers things under the formality of being divinely revealed (*revelata*), whatever things are revealable (*revelabilia*) possesses the one formality of the object of this science; and therefore they are included under Sacred Doctrine as under one science.[43]

Gilson claims that Aquinas is here making a distinction between *revelata* (things that God has actually revealed, e.g., that Jesus is the Son of God, that God is a Trinity of persons) and *revelabilia* (things which belong to theology but which reason can know). *Revelabilia* further divides into two classes: those things which God has revealed and which philosophy can prove (e.g. that God exists, that He is all-knowing) and those things which

[41] *Ibid*., p. 36.
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] *ST* I, q. 1, a. 3.

philosophy can prove but which God did not reveal even though they contribute to humans attaining heaven (e.g. that the soul is immortal, that there is not one intellect for all humans).[44]

The knowledge which natural reason can attain, God and the blessed (angels and saints) in heaven know, and consequently could have been revealed. Since these naturally knowable philosophical truths are part of God's knowledge (which encompasses all truth), the theologian has license to engage in philosophy as philosophy. "Thus, related to the knowledge which God has of Himself, and, as it were, glorified by its theological assumption, philosophy eminently deserves the attention of the Christian Doctor...."[45] Unlike Pelikan who claims that Aquinas included philosophical proofs for God, for example, because Scripture declares on divine authority that such is possible, Gilson sees such proofs as part of God's knowledge which revelation could have disclosed.

R E. Houser, in examining Gilson's argument in detail, notes both its logical as well as textual difficulties. First, Houser notes that the logic of the argument "opens theology too wide, for every truth discoverable by the human mind could be revealed by God..."[46] Gilson, in making mere possible revelation the rationale for philosophy's inclusion in theology, has no way to keep any of philosophy, or indeed any human science whatsoever, out of theology. Since God knows everything, and He has (or might have) revealed any truth, any truth might be a properly, intrinsically, theological truth. Aquinas himself, however, recognizes the limits of various sciences, including theology, and does not advocate for all truth being the domain of Sacred Doctrine founded on faith in God's revelation.

Houser goes on to show that Aquinas's inclusion of what philosophy knows by natural reason under what God could have revealed (*revelabilia*) as distinct from what he does supernaturally

[44] R. E. Houser, "Trans-forming Philosophical Water into Theological Wine: Gilson and Aquinas," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 69 (1995), p. 105.
[45] Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, translated by L. K. Shook, (Random House, 1956), 14.
[46] Houser, *art. cit*., p. 106.

reveal (*revelata*) is not a distinction that Aquinas actually makes. Rather it is a product of the Thomistic commentary tradition.[47] Houser thus translates *ST* I, q. 1, a. 3

> Therefore, *because* sacred scripture considers things as they are divinely revealed (*revelata*), as has been said, all things which are divinely revealable (*revelabilia*) communicate in one formal aspect of the object of this science.[48]

In context, Aquinas makes clear that what is revealable parallels the sensible, and Houser notes, something is sensible when an animal or human has the passive capacity to be affected by an object with actual sense qualities.

> Far from separating *revelata* and *revelabilia*, Aquinas's analogy with sensation identifies the two. *Sensata* and *sensibilia* do not signify different classes of things, but refer to the same things. They are called *sensata* because they actually cause cognition, and *sensibilia* because they are objects of cognitive *power*. Likewise, *revelata* and *revelabilia* do not signify different things but have the same referent - what has actually been revealed by God. *Revelata* signifies those things which have been revealed in respect of actually having come from the divine author, from the perspective of their efficient cause. *Revelabilia* signifies things revealed as objects of the knowledge the theologian can have of them.[49]

Thus, the revealable is what a Christian may understand about even a naturally knowable object in light of what God *has* revealed about its relation to Him. What precisely the relation to Himself that God reveals, and how it applies to philosophical truths, Aquinas develops through the following articles of Question 1 of Part I of the *Summa*. A brief survey of these texts confirms that he does not specify the formal object of theology only in terms of revelation, but also in terms of what he calls the 'divine light.'

[47] *Ibid.*
[48] *Ibid.*, p. 107.
[49] *Ibid.*

Divinely Revealed

As noted at the beginning of our discussion of the relationship between philosophy and theology, in the very first article of the first question of the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas writes that Sacred Doctrine exists to enable people to fulfill the goal for which God created human beings, vis., to achieve union with God, a goal beyond what reason can discover (or unaided human effort can achieve) by revealing and informing them about that goal. So, theology teaches truths about God and how to achieve salvation which no one could discover by natural reason, unless God revealed them. And even naturally discoverable truths "would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors," so God revealed these too to allow people to receive salvation "more fittingly and more surely" (*et convenientius et certius*). Thus, not only is theology characterized by what is in Scripture and revelation which Christians accept in faith, but also the purpose for which God reveals both naturally and supernaturally knowable truth, i.e., for the sake of human salvation. For it is by sharing in this one goal of revelation, more than what revelation itself contains, which makes possible and legitimate for Aquinas the use of genuine rational philosophical knowledge within Sacred Doctrine.

In article 2, Aquinas describes the formality or light of Sacred Doctrine as the knowledge (*scientia*) that God and the saints and angels in heaven possess, held or acquired by direct vision of God Himself, and that God subsequently communicates through revelation.

> So it is that Sacred Doctrine is a science because it proceeds from principles known by the light of a higher science, namely, the science of God and the blessed. Hence, just as the musician believes the principles handed on to him by the mathematician, so Sacred Doctrine believes principles revealed by God.

Aquinas in Article 3, as we noted above, writes that everything taught in Sacred Doctrine shares in one common formality, that of being divinely revealed and revealable (in Scripture), and in Reply to Objection 2 of this article, he again describes the one formality of Sacred Doctrine as revealable.

> Similarly, Sacred Doctrine, precisely as a single science, is able to consider, under one rational formal aspect, namely insofar as they are divinely revealable (*sunt divinitus revelabilia*), objects which are treated by different philosophical sciences.

Finally, in Article 5, Reply to Objection 2, Aquinas writes that Sacred Doctrine "accepts its principles not from other sciences, but immediately from God through revelation."

Divine Light

Aquinas also describes the one formality that unites Sacred Doctrine as one science, not in terms of revelation, but of vision and divine light.

In Article 3, Reply to Objection 1, Aquinas describes this formality as the aspect of relating to God in Himself and as He is creation's origin and goal.

> Sacred Doctrine does not teach about God and creatures equally, but about God primarily, and creatures only so far as they are referrable to God as their beginning or end.

In Article 4, Aquinas describes the formality without mention of revelation:

> Sacred Doctrine, being one, extends to things which belong to different philosophical sciences because it considers in each the same formal aspect, namely, so far as they can be known through divine light.

Aquinas says in Article 6 that the knowledge of God that Sacred Doctrine attains is of two sorts: First "it treats of Him ... as He can be known through creatures..." This sort of knowledge is "what the philosophers knew" (*quod philosophi cognoverunt*). Second, Sacred Doctrine treats of God "so far as He is known to Himself alone and revealed to others."

In article 7, the description of the formality of Sacred Doctrine does not mention revelation, but is given again in relation to God:

> But in Sacred Doctrine all things are treated under the rational aspect of God, either because they are God Himself, or because

> they are referred to God as to their beginning and end … so far as they are ordered to God.

As this brief survey of these texts shows, and as Houser convincingly argues, revelation as such, whether explicit in Scripture or virtual and implicit in what could be revealed, is not (or is not simply (*simpliciter*)), in fact, the unifying principle of Sacred Doctrine for Aquinas. It is rather the goal, or end to which God intends revelation to lead, a goal ultimately realized in heaven in the happiness of knowing God Himself and seeing Him face to face. Throughout his career, Aquinas taught that serving the end of theology, and that *alone*, is what justifies making use of philosophy, and that that use is made within theology itself.[50] All teaching undertaken for this purpose, which very purpose itself is something that God reveals, places that teaching formally within Sacred Doctrine. This applies, too, to theology's use of philosophy; by thus sharing in the end of theology, philosophy is incorporated into theology and the theologian as such is able to make legitimate use of philosophy.

It is in terms of sharing in the end of revelation, that Aquinas, as we saw before in his *Commentary on Boethius's On the Trinity*, q. 2, a. 3, Reply to Objection 5, likens philosophy in the service of the faith to transubstantiated wine. "Those who use the works of philosophers in sacred doctrine, by bringing them into the service of faith, do not mix water with wine, but rather change water into wine." Houser explains:

> What has transubstantiated philosophical water into theological wine is 'service to faith.' ... What makes all scientific conclusions fully theological is that they lead to, not where they come from; their end not their premises.[51]

Even philosophical sciences which proceed by natural reason can also be theological if they are of service to faith and lead or are directed to the goal which, and for which, God revealed His own science of Himself. That goal is, in fact, God Himself, by which

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 111.
[51] *Ibid.*

humans attain salvation and eternal happiness in the contemplation of God's own essence in the Beatific Vision.

Revelation through Scripture (whether revealed (*revelata*) or revealable (*revelabilia*)) is not the most central aspect to the subject of Sacred Doctrine. Rather originating from and being oriented toward God is the formal aspect under which Sacred Doctrine focuses on whatever it considers. Things besides God are known by Sacred Doctrine in terms of their relation to Him. Nevertheless, revelation is still important for Sacred Doctrine, but not because everything it deals with is either actually or virtually contained in it. Rather, for Aquinas, Sacred Doctrine shares in the one formal aspect by which revelation itself operates, i.e., the formality of what Scripture contains and why, which is to disclose God as man's last end, a goal that exceeds what reason alone could discover.

Aquinas thus brings the lower philosophical sciences into theology without overwhelming the light of reason by which they know. In themselves, philosophical sciences know things for their own sake (speculatively) or for the sake of human action, and natural human happiness (Aristotle's fulfillment or flourishing (*eudaimonia*)). But such natural knowledge can be taken up into theology insofar revelation illumines it by referring it to God as origin and goal, according as He is known to Himself alone, shared in by the blessed in heaven, and which relation He reveals in Scripture for the salvation of people.

Handmaids: Preserving the Integrity of Philosophy

Yet, while serving the end of faith and theology may make philosophy useful to the theologian, it also seems to overwhelm the natural, rational character of philosophy, transforming the philosophy so used into theology, and making it fit for no one who does not share that same faith. For Aquinas, however, coming to share only in the end of theology, not being explicitly or implicitly revealed or revealable, actually preserves the integrity of philosophy within his theological works and makes it useful and informative to those non theists and non-Christians.

> The end of an argument does not affect the principles from which it flows. Purely rational principles make the arguments of Christian philosophy philosophical; their faith-given end

> makes them theological. This is what ensures that the philosophy within theology is fully philosophical "in essence" and "in method," while fully theological in purpose.[52]

Thankfully, Thomas Aquinas elaborates on the relationship of philosophy to theology in a way other than as transubstantiated water into wine, a way that preserves the integrity and autonomy of philosophy when considered and used by his students who do not share his Christian faith. In his *Sentences* commentary, Aquinas likened theology's use of philosophy to a feudal lord directing his vassal, and to ordering and subordinated sciences and arts.

> [Sacred Doctrine] itself makes use of all the other sciences in their service (*obsequium*) to it, as though they were its vassals. This is clear in all the ordered arts, where the end of one is under the end of another. For example, the end of the art of ointments, which is the production of medicines, is ordered to the end of medicine, which is health; this is why the physician directs the ointment-maker and uses the ointments he makes for his own end. So too, since the end of the whole of philosophy is under the end of theology, and is ordered to it, theology ought to direct other sciences and use what is taught in them.[53]

Aquinas notes the parallel between the end or goal of the art of ointment-making in concocting medicine being subservient to the end of medicine, i.e., health of the body, and the end of theology, seeing God face to face in heaven, using and directing philosophy.[54] There are limits however, to this direction which Aquinas will make clear in other texts that elaborate on this sort of relationship between ordering and subordinated sciences. Even in this text, though, Aquinas seems to recognize that the physician must respect the art of ointment making; the elixir produced must be truly conducive to health while being herbally possible. Likewise, theology can only direct philosophy to prove true and necessary conclusions. The subordinated art or science must and

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[52] *Ibid.*, p. 112.
[53] *Commentary on the Sentences,* Bk. I, Prologue, q. 1, a. 1.
[54] Houser, *art. cit.*, p. 110.

can only operate according to reality and the truth of things as they are (and, the theologian knows, as God made them).

In Question 1, Article 5, Reply to Objection 2 of the *Summa*, Aquinas invokes the same analogy to describe more precisely the relationship between natural and supernatural knowledge in the study of theology. Sacred Doctrine, he says, includes and employs philosophy in the manner that architectonic sciences order and organize others in accomplishing their own larger goals and purposes, e.g., as political theory makes use of military studies. He explains in his *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics* the "arts are called architectonic which direct other subserving arts, just as the captain of a ship directs shipbuilders, and the military [directs] horsemanship."[55] Thus, Sacred Doctrine takes natural philosophical sciences into itself by directing them to accomplish its own end that lies beyond their ability. Philosophical disciplines thus serve as handmaids to theology.

> This science is able to take something from the philosophical disciplines, not as though it requires them of necessity, but only for the greater clarity of what is taught in this science. For it accepts its principles not from other sciences, but immediately from God through revelation. Therefore, it does not depend upon other sciences as higher (than itself), but makes use of them as lesser, and as handmaidens: just as architectonic sciences make use of subservient ones, as the civil [makes use of] military [science].

In his *Commentary on Aristotle's Ethics*, Aquinas correspondingly writes that the architectonic science of politics uses arts and sciences subject to it for its own ends, as equestrian art directs bridle-making, or in directing the smith to make knives of a particular kind, presumably for soldiers for the sake of defending the state.[56] There are, Aquinas notes, limits on the direction an architectonic science gives to speculative and theoretical sciences such as mathematics, geometry, and presumably philosophy.

[55] Book V, Lecture 1, no. 758.

[56] Book I, Lecture 2, no. 26.

> But political science does not dictate to a speculative science … about the determination of its proper activity, for while political science may order that some people teach or learn geometry … but not what it should conclude about a triangle, for this … depends on the very nature of things.[57]

Likewise, while Sacred Doctrine may direct and use philosophical sciences for its own end of attaining the Beatific Vision as an architectonic science like politics, theology would be similarly constrained not to dictate to philosophy what it should conclude about its own proper subject nor the principles and methods it uses to discover truth.

Conclusion

By thus showing that Sacred Doctrine is unified not just as things are revealable (*revelabilia*) or revealed (*revelata*) as being implicitly or potential and actually contained in the books of the Bible, but as the divine light shows their relation to God as source and goal, Aquinas incorporates natural, philosophical science into theology, while at the same time respecting its autonomy, guaranteeing the natural has not been overcome or tainted by the supernatural.

Thus, such sciences as Aristotelian natural philosophy and its doctrine of form and matter (see below, Chapter 3) can belong in Sacred Doctrine in Aquinas's explanation in the *Summa* that the human soul is the form of a natural organized human body, and that each person has their own intellect (in opposition to the Latin Averroists mentioned above). This is legitimate, not because revelation says it can be naturally known, nor because it could have been revealed. It is legitimate because God has revealed that the things treated in that science are related to God as first originating cause and humans' last end. So, in seeking to know human beings, Aquinas uses philosophy as philosophy, and understands by the light of natural reason that the human soul is the form of a naturally organized body capable of life. This philosophical truth, though, also supports the theological truth that the soul cannot pre-exist the biological gestation of a suitable body (although each

[57] *Ibid*, no 27.

human soul can survive the death of its body and is naturally immortal). But the arguments are also theological since the theologian, by the divine light given in revelation in Scripture, sees (as exceeding the grasp of reason) that human persons are related to God as their first cause and last end, and the philosophical knowledge itself is also so related.

And again, as Aquinas stated in his *Commentary on Boethius's On the Trinity*, theology may use philosophical/natural reasoning if and only if it is true, since God is the source of all truth, and any truth is referrable to Him as source, form, or end. This means that a philosophical conclusion that does not accord with Christian teaching must be false. In this way, Sacred Doctrine is said not to prove the principles of other sciences, but to judge them, especially the teachings of philosophers. It remains to philosophy as such, even though as part of a theological enterprise (as in the *Summa*, *et al.*) to present true conclusions by the light of natural reason, and to discover the error, or the non-necessity, in false ones.