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AD FONTES

A JOURNAL OF PROTESTANT LETTERS

THOMAS'S LEGACY 800 YEARS LATER: A SYMPOSIUM

TIM JACOBS
Theology as a Science: The Story of Aristotle's Recovery and the Thomistic Revolution

RYAN HURD
A Thomist: Quid Sit?

NATHAN JOHNSON
Deus Est or Deus ex Machina?: How René Descartes Rescued Anselm's Ontological Argument From Thomas's Critique

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About

***AD FONTES* IS A QUARTERLY JOURNAL PUBLISHED BY THE DAVENANT INSTITUTE.**
Ad fontes, "to the sources," was a rallying cry of the Reformation. The Reformers bequeathed to us a heritage, rooted in the Scriptures and their wide-ranging humanistic studies, which sought to address the hard questions of theology, philosophy, and culture in a way that was true to the revelation of God's word and God's world. *Ad Fontes* channels this ethos into a modern context, seeking to explore our questions alongside the great cloud of witnesses and the many exemplars who have gone before us.

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From the Editor's Desk

2025 was a year of anniversaries. Of course every year is, but few years contain anniversaries as significant: 2025 marks 1700 years since Nicaea (AD 325) and 800 years since the birth of Thomas Aquinas (AD 1225). Our next issue, coming this December, will be a tribute to Nicaea, and this issue includes a symposium honoring the Angelic Doctor.

First, Tim Jacobs offers a historical piece on Thomas, telling the story of how Aristotle was forgotten and rediscovered within the Church's first millennium. He also reflects on the right relationship of philosophy to theology. The legitimacy of philosophy in its own right and as an aid to theology is highly disputed, even in Davenant's circles. Jacobs argues that there are benefits to considering theology a science the way the medievals did. Whether or not you agree, I hope Jacobs' piece will provoke thought and discussion.

Next in our symposium, Ryan Hurd explores the question, "what is a Thomist?" Is one a Thomist by believing what Thomas believed? Or by adopting Thomas's epistemology? What does it look like to follow in the footsteps of the Dumb Ox? Hurd takes up this question, arguing that a Thomist is someone who learns to think through theological problems as Thomas did. Hurd's writing is dense and sometimes technical. This kind of precision requires additional mental effort from the reader, but leaves less room for confusion on the other side. If you have never read Hurd's writing before, I hope you will enjoy both the mental exercise itself and also the illumination it produces.

Nathan Johnson examines Thomas's critique of Anselm's ontological argument and Anselm's surprising defender–René Descartes. While Descartes did not mention either Anselm or Thomas by name, Johnson demonstrates that Descartes grappled with the theological interplay between the two giants, and postulates that Descartes may have been trying, whether overtly or not, to defend Anselm from Thomas's devastating critiques.

As it happens, 2025 also marks the 250th anniversary of Jane Austen's birth on December 16, 1775. In my article, I explore what personal habits and traits Austen believed were needed in order to build virtue. Alasdair MacIntyre and others have argued that Jane Austen's works, while in the form of romantic novels, are much more interested in virtue formation than romance. In this article I ask, how do Jane Austen's heroines build character despite a faulty childhood moral formation?

In our Books and Arts section, M.W. Sinnett grapples with the idolatrous ultimacy of the market in his review of Harvey Cox's *The Market as God,* and Louis Markos reviews Knut Heim's *A Hermeneutic of Imagination.* Even if you are not an opera enthusiast, you should not miss Zsanna Mária Bodor's beautiful reflections on operas and their under-appreciated librettists in her review of *Weep, Shudder, Die: On Opera and Poetry*.

Our new Poetry Editor, Michael Riggins, has selected excellent poems by Ben Eggerton and Betsy Howard for your enjoyment and contemplation.

We close our issue with a new section dedicated to what we are all about here at *Ad Fontes:* returning to the sources. Peter Martyr Vermigli is not (yet) a household name, but during the Reformation the works of this lesser known reformer were a trusted source for understanding the Eucharist, predestination, political theory, and much more. Davenant Press has just re-released the individual volumes of the Peter Martyr Vermigli library with updated covers, and this December 4th you'll be able to buy all nine volumes as a complete set. It is fitting that we close out this issue in prayer, and so we have given Vermigli the last word with prayers based on Psalm one.

The *Ad Fontes* editors want to thank you for your patience over the last six months or so, while we reconfigured and recalibrated things behind the scenes. Lord willing, we are back on schedule and the next year of issues will arrive as expected. I hope you enjoy this issue.

Robin Jean Harris
Interim Senior Editor
October 2025

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SYMPOSIUM

Theology as a Science: The Story of Aristotle's Recovery and the Thomistic Revolution

TIM JACOBS

INTRODUCTION

While it is often said that philosophy is the handmaiden of theology, some use this as an excuse to treat philosophy as optional. In the modern mind, the harmony of these two disciplines has fractured, even among advocates for the compatibility of faith and reason. On the contrary, Thomas Aquinas defends theology as a science precisely because it appropriates philosophy in a way that acknowledges the unity of all knowledge and the harmony of faith and reason.[1]

Aquinas's work arose in a time of intellectual renewal in the twelfth century as the Latin West rediscovered Aristotle. The story of Aristotle's rise, fall, and recovery is also the story of how the two separate paths of philosophy and theology converge into one. At the crossroads stands Thomas Aquinas, defending the unity of all knowledge and transforming systematic theology into a science. So the story of the transmission of Aristotle's corpus is also the story of the birth and development of scholasticism.

I. THE LOSS AND RECOVERY OF ARISTOTLE

Aristotle's Missing Library

We know that Aristotle's works were recovered in the twelfth century, but how were they lost and how were they recovered?[2] The loss of Aristotle began immedi-

1. This article is revised from a paper given at the 2022 Davenant Convivium, "Theology as a Science: Aquinas on How Philosophy Transforms Theology."

2. See David Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought* (London, Longmans, 1962): 185–192; Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, Jan Pinbor, eds., *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy from the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism 1100–1600* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 55–64;

ately after his death in 322 BC. Aristotle was born in 384 BC to the physician of King Amyntas III of Macedon. At age seventeen Aristotle attended Plato's Academy in Athens and became his star pupil (c.367 BC). Plato died twenty years later (c. 347), and Aristotle, age 37, traveled around the Aegean Sea to research biology with fellow academics, marry a princess, and father a daughter. In 343 BC, Philip II invited Aristotle to tutor his son Alexander ("the Great"). At age 50, Aristotle returned to Athens to found his own school, the Lyceum (c. 335 BC). He surrounded himself with a team of researchers studying philosophy, mathematics, logic, rhetoric, astronomy, and every other discipline. The Lyceum became the first research institute, and its library amassed an impressive collection of texts.

> **WHILE THE STOICS SAW THE LOGOS AS AN IMPERSONAL TRANSCENDENT CREATOR, PHILO INTRODUCED THE LOGOS AS THE PERSONAL JEWISH GOD, AND JOHN INTRODUCED HIM AS INCARNATE.**

Alexander the Great died in 323 BC, and anti-Macedonian sentiment arose in Athens. Aristotle fled, not wanting Athens "to sin twice against philosophy," since Athens had executed Socrates seventy-five years earlier. Aristotle died of disease the following year, leaving his pupil Theophrastus (371–287) as his successor and head of the Lyceum. Theophrastus's student, Demetrius of Phaleron, became advisor to Ptolemy I of Egypt and suggested that he build a library to imitate the Lyceum. Ptolemy's plans were carried out by Ptolemy II, who built the famous Library of Alexandria. When Theophrastus died, Aristotle's library did not pass to the next head of the Lyceum, but to Theophrastus's nephew Neleus of Skepsis, one of Aristotle's last surviving pupils. Neleus's descendants claim he hid Aristotle's works from being confiscated by King Eumenes II of Pergamon (197–160 BC), who built a library to rival Alexandria. Aristotle's works were later returned to Athens where they were confiscated a century later by the Roman general Sulla when he sacked Athens (86 BC). Sulla moved the library's contents to Rome to be published by Andronicus of Rhodes.

Meanwhile, Plato's Academy was overrun by skepticism, and two other schools arose in Athens, started by Epicurus (341–270 BC) and the Stoic Zeno of Citium (334–262 BC). Fifty years after his death, Aristotle would not have recognized the intellectual culture of Athens. However, Plato's Academy was re-founded in the second century BC to oppose skepticism, and Middle Platonism was born.

In Alexandria, Ptolemy II's influence allowed scholarship to flourish, even among the Alexandrian Jews (see Acts 6:9, 18:24). He commissioned the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible, which later bore the influence of Greek philosophy. For example, The Wisdom of Solomon 8:7 lists Plato's cardinal virtues: "If anyone loves righteousness, her labors are virtues; for she teaches temperance and prudence, justice and courage." When Theophrastus met Jews in Alexandria, he said they were "philosophers by race": "They converse with each other about the deity, and at nighttime they make observations of the stars, gazing at them and calling on God by prayer."[3]

The most famous Jewish philosopher of this time was the Middle Platonist Philo of Alexandria (25 BC–50 AD). He was the first to use Greek philosophy in theology. He used the Stoic conception of *logos* to describe the Mind of God. The Greek word *logos* originally meant only "word" until Heraclitus (c. 500 BC) extended it to include that which words represent—reason. Since intellect is the source of order, he saw the natural world as ordered by divine *logos*. The Stoics adopted the divine Logos as a fatalistic sovereign. As Stoicism became widespread in the Greco-Roman world, their conception of *logos* did too. Philo used the Stoic Logos to interpret the personification of wisdom in Proverbs, claiming Logos was the mind of God and part of a divine triad.[4]

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3. Quoted in Diodorus Siculus, B*ibliotheca Historica*, 40.3.1–3.
4. Philo, *De Cherubim* 1.27-28.

Philo was an older contemporary of the Apostle John, who, like Philo, refers to the Logos as Creator in John 1. While the Stoics saw the Logos as an impersonal transcendent creator, Philo introduced the Logos as the personal Jewish God, and John introduced Him as incarnate. It seems that for the Stoics, "what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made" (Romans 1:19-20). When Paul talks to Stoics in Acts 17, he tells them that they can personally know "the unknown god," and quotes the Stoic philosopher Aratus, saying, "We are indeed his offspring" (v. 28). Aratus and two of the heads of the Stoic school in Athens were also from Tarsus, Paul's hometown.

Early Christianity and the Loss of Aristotle

The early church grew up in the Greco-Roman world, and many of its leaders were steeped in Greek philosophy. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215 AD), for example, adopted Philo's Platonic hermeneutics by explaining away difficult passages of Scripture with allegory.[5] Allegorical interpretation would become common Christian practice for more than a thousand years. Clement was head of the Christian Catechetical School of Alexandria, which was founded by St. Mark the Evangelist.[6] He was succeeded by Origen (185–254 AD), who had studied under the Platonist Ammonius Saccas (c. 175–242 AD). Ammonius's other famous student was Plotinus (c. 204–270 AD), the founder of Neoplatonism.

Plotinus and his student Porphyry (c. 234–305 AD) were perhaps the last philosophers with access to Aristotle's complete corpus. Porphyry wrote an introduction to Aristotle's *Categories* (*Isagoge*) and introduced Aristotle's logic into Neoplatonic schools. Aristotle's *Categories* and *On Interpretation* were translated into Latin by Gaius Marius Victorinus (290–364 AD), preserving their use in the West while the rest of Aristotle's corpus fell out of use. Victorinus's conversion to Christianity influenced the conversion of Augustine (354–430 AD), who drew heavily from Plotinus's Neoplatonism in his Trinitarian theology.

Meanwhile, Christianity continued to use Aristotle's logic. When the Nicene Creed says the Son is "of the same substance (*homo-ousion*) as the Father," the councils of Nicaea (325 AD) and Constantinople (381 AD) were adapting Aristotle's conception of substance (*ousia*) from his *Categories*. Not long after, Boethius (480–524 AD) prepared the way for scholasticism by using Aristotle's logic in his *On The Trinity* and translating much of Aristotle's work.

The exact date of the loss of Aristotle's corpus is uncertain. We know that Augustine studied Aristotle's *Categories* in his twenties in Carthage (c. 374 AD), but he does not refer to any other work.[7] Only 75 years earlier, Porphyry, also in North Africa, wrote commentaries on Aristotle's work. After Plotinus and Porphyry, it is clear that only *Categories* and *On Interpretation* were widely circulated, thanks to the translations of Victorinus and Boethius. Despite their lives overlapping by three years, Boethius did not have access to as much of Aristotle as Simplicius of Cilicia (480–540 AD), who was educated by Ammonius in Alexandria and commented extensively on Aristotle.

By the fifth century, the East-West divide was strong enough to contribute to the loss of Aristotle. Use of the Greek language declined in the West, and Neoplatonism overshadowed Aristotelianism. The best estimate for when Aristotle's corpus was lost is the third or fourth century: either following the life of Plotinus (c. 234–305 AD) or following Constantine's relocating of the imperial capital to Constantinople in 330 AD. All of the Greek schools in Athens continued with fading influence until Emperor Justinian shut them down in 529 AD, because he declared the schools' philosophy to be anti-Christian paganism.

5. David Dawson, *Allegorical Readers and Cultural Revision in Ancient Alexandria* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 18.

6. Jerome, *De Viris Illustribus* (*On Illustrious Men*), sections 8 & 11.

7. Augustine says, "What good did it do me that at the age of twenty there came into my hands a work of Aristotle which they call the Ten Categories?" *Confessions* 4.28, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

SCHOLASTICISM APPLIED ARISTOTLE'S LOGIC TO DOCTRINAL DISPUTE IN ORDER TO DEMAND DIALECTICAL PROOF BASED ON CAREFUL ARGUMENTATION. WHILE DOCTRINAL CONTENT WAS STILL MORE INFLUENCED BY PLATONISM, THEOLOGICAL METHOD BEGAN TO SHIFT.

The Birth of Scholasticism

While Aristotle's corpus was absent in the West, a revival of learning took place that gave rise to scholasticism. In 787 AD, Charlemagne decreed that schools be established in abbeys across the empire.[8] The Irish Neoplatonist Johannes Scotus Eriugena (800–877) was invited to the capital, and his use of Aristotle's logic caught on. Boethius and Eriugena paved the way for scholasticism, but Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) deserves the title "the father of scholasticism" for his extensive work uniting faith and reason.[9] Previous church Fathers developed a system for Christian philosophy based on Platonic thought, which leaned towards mysticism, allegorical interpretation, and spiritual intuition. Scholasticism applied Aristotle's logic to doctrinal dispute in order to demand dialectical proof based on careful argumentation. While doctrinal content was still more influenced by Platonism, theological method began to shift.

In these dialectical debates, Anselm defended the existence of universals against Roscelin of Compiegne, whose nominalism denied that the three persons of the Trinity were one substance. Roscelin's nominalism was also rejected by his student, Peter Abelard (1079–1142 AD), who used Aristotle's logic to formally introduce the scholastic method of *disputatio*. In *Sic et Non* (*Yes and No*), Abelard presents the views of patristic authorities in opposition to each other, then presents his own view. Peter Lombard (1096–1160 AD) popularized Abelard's method in his more extensive catalog of patristic authorities, *The Sentences*.[10]

8. Colish, Marcia L., *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition*, 400–1400 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 66–67.

9. Paul Schaff, *Mediaeval Christianity,* vol. IV of *History of the Christian Church* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), § 176, "Johannes Scotus Erigena."

10. Joseph Koterski, "On the Aristotelian Heritage of John of Damascus," In *The Failure of Modernism: The Cartesian Legacy and Contemporary Pluralism*, ed. Brendan Sweetman (Washington, D.C.: The American Maritain Association and Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 67.

The rise of scholasticism accelerated when the newly established University of Oxford (c. 1096) and University of Paris (c. 1150) adopted Lombard's *Sentences* as a standard text and *disputatio* as their teaching method.[11] In *disputatio*, a lector would read a passage aloud, briefly explain its meaning, then address a series of questions that arose from the text. Lombard's work inspired careful argumentation and conceptual analysis, though it was not yet recognizable as systematic theology. The recovery of Aristotle's complete corpus in the West would change theology forever.

RECOVERY OF ARISTOTLE

The recovery of Aristotle's corpus likely begins with the Arab conquest of Byzantine Syria in the seventh century. Muslim scholars gained access to many of Aristotle's works, which had been preserved and translated into Arabic by Nestorian Christians. Aristotle came to dominate Muslim philosophy, which is exemplified in the most famous Muslim Scholastics Al-Farabi (870–951), Avicenna (Ibn Sina) (c.980–1037), and Averroes (Ibn Rushd) (c. 1126–1198).

In 1085, a decade before the First Crusade, Muslim occupied Toledo fell to Christian Spain. Gerard of Cremona (1114–1187) visited Toledo and said that he was impressed by the "knowledge of each part of [philosophy]... which he did not find at all amongst the Latins."[12] The translations of Aristotle and Muslim commentaries by Gerard, James of Venice, and others brought Aristotle back to the Latin West.[13]

11. William E. Carroll, "Thomas Aquinas on Science, *Sacra Doctrina*, and Creation," vol. 1, *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions: Up to 1700*, ed. Jitse M. van der Meer (Danvers: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2008), 219.

12. Charles Burnett, "The Coherence of the Arabic-Latin Translation Program in Toledo in the Twelfth Century." *Science in Context* (2001), 14 (1–2): 249–288.

13. Robert Pasnau, "The Latin Aristotle," in *the Oxford Handbook of Aristotle*, ed. Christopher Shields (OUP: 2012), 666. Available at https://spot.colorado.edu/~pasnau/inprint/pasnau.latinaristotle.pdf.

Its first significant impact was on Robert Grosseteste (1170–1253), who used Aristotle's scientific method to become the father of experimental science.

> **THE REINTRODUCTION OF ARISTOTLE WAS TUMULTUOUS AS THEOLOGIANS WRESTLED WITH HOW THE PHILOSOPHY OF ARISTOTLE WOULD INTERACT WITH THE PREVIOUS TWELVE CENTURIES OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT.**

The reintroduction of Aristotle was tumultuous as theologians wrestled with how the philosophy of Aristotle would interact with the previous twelve centuries of Christian thought. By 1230 AD, the Faculty of Arts at the 80-year old University of Paris were already hotly debating *Nicomachean Ethics*.[14] Some saw his denial of the immortality of the soul and other doctrines as incompatible with Christianity. In 1210, Aristotle was banned from Paris, but only five years later his *Nicomachean Ethics* was on the optional reading list.[15] By 1255, Aristotle's corpus was compulsory reading, and it survived subsequent attempts at censure.[16] The greatest defense of Aristotle would come from a theological giant who would do for Aristotle what Augustine did for Plato, and his work would prompt Dante (1265–1321) to call Aristotle "the master of those who know."[17]

Aquinas in Defense of Aristotle

While Oxford and Paris were debating Aristotle, the scholarly Franciscan and Dominican orders were founded and became established in the universities. In 1243, at age nineteen, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) joined the Dominican Order against his family's wishes. After studying at the University of Naples, where he first read Aristotle, and a short house-arrest by his family, he was sent to the University of Paris in 1245. He came under the tutelage of Albertus Magnus, who defended Aristotelian scientific method, though his theology was still Neoplatonic.[18] Thomas learned to appreciate Aristotle, and he took on the task of showing how Aristotle's scientific method could transform theology.[19] In 1248, Albert was sent to Cologne, and Thomas followed him, turning down an offer by Pope Innocent IV to appoint him abbot of Monte Cassino. As a student, Thomas's physical weight and introversion earned him the nickname "the dumb ox," but Albert accurately predicted, "We call him the dumb ox, but in his teaching he will one day produce such a bellowing that it will be heard throughout the world."[20] From 1252 to 1256, Thomas returned to Paris and studied to be a master in theology. At this time, he wrote his *Commentary on the Sentences* and *De Ente et Essentia* (*On Being and Essence*). In 1256, he was appointed regent master where he oversaw the formal disputations and wrote *Disputed Questions on Truth*, *Quodlibetal Questions*, and *Commentary on Boethius's De Trinitate*.

Thomas left Paris in 1259 to teach in Italy. In 1265, he was appointed papal theologian in Rome where he wrote his apologetic work *Summa contra Gentiles* and

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14. Valeria A. Buffon, "The Structure of the Soul, Intellectual Virtues, and the Ethical Ideal of Masters of Arts in Early Commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics*," in *Virtue Ethics in the Middle Ages: Commentaries on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, 1200–1500*, ed. Istvan P. Bejczy (Boston: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2008), 13.

15. Aristotle and Averroist commentaries denied such doctrines as God as a passive unmoved mover, that there is numerical one intellect for all humans, that the separated soul cannot suffer from bodily fire, that God cannot grant immortality to mortals, that God cannot know singulars, that human acts are not ruled by Providence, and more. Thijssen, Hans, "Condemnation of 1277", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/condemnation/>. See also Rubenstein, Richard E. *Aristotle's Children: How Christians, Muslims, and Jews Rediscovered Ancient Wisdom and Illuminated the Middle Ages* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004), 215–217.

16. Irene Zavattero, "Moral and Intellectual Virtues in the Earliest Latin Commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics*," In *Virtue Ethics in the Middle Ages: Commentaries on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, 1200–1500*, ed. Istvan P. Bejczy (Boston: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2008), 31.

17. *il maestro di color che sanno*.

18. McInerny, Ralph and John O'Callaghan, "Saint Thomas Aquinas", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/aquinas/>.

19. Führer, Markus, "Albert the Great", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/albert-great/>.

20. Quoted in Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2003, 2007), 3.

began *Summa Theologiæ.* He returned to teaching in Paris from 1268 to 1272, until the Dominicans called him to establish a school in his home province in Italy. While celebrating mass in 1273, Thomas had a vision and ceased work on the *Summa Theologiæ*. His secretary, Reginald of Piperno, urged him to continue, but Thomas said, "Reginald, I cannot, because all that I have written seems like straw to me." After Thomas's death in 1274, Reginald and his colleagues completed the *Summa* by adding a supplement drawn from his other writings. Thomas Aquinas left behind a massive corpus of 8 million words, compared to Augustine's 5 million. The *Summa* alone is 2 million words.

WHILE THE LAST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY HAS SEEN CATHOLICS DIVIDED ON AQUINAS, PROTESTANTS HAVE DISPLAYED A RENEWED INTEREST IN HIM AS CENTRAL RATHER THAN ANCILLARY.

After Aquinas's death, his writings came under attack by Franciscans, Avveroists, Bonaventurians, Scotists, and Ockhamists. Ralph McInerny says he "countered both the Averroistic interpretations of Aristotle and the Franciscan tendency to reject Greek philosophy. The result was a new *modus vivendi* [way of life] between faith and philosophy which survived until the rise of the new physics."[21] In 1323, Aquinas was canonized by Pope John XXII who said, "There are as many miracles as articles of the *Summa*." More recently the 1879 *Aeterni Patris* by Pope Leo XIII called Thomistic thought "the paladin of philosophy" against the modernist tradition, though Thomistic revival was shut down by Vatican II in 1962–65.[22] In 1998, John Paul II reaffirmed the importance of Aquinas in *Fides et Ratio*. While the last half of the twentieth century has seen Catholics divided on Aquinas, Protestants have displayed a renewed interest in him as central rather than ancillary.

21. McInerny, Ralph and John O'Callaghan, "Saint Thomas Aquinas", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/aquinas/>.

22. McInerny and O'Callaghan, "Saint Thomas Aquinas", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* .

What did Aquinas see in Aristotle that others around him did not? He had a vision that theology could use the tools of Aristotelian logic to pursue doctrine with the rigor of deductive reasoning and systematic analysis. Where Clement and Augustine employed Platonism for allegorical interpretation, Aquinas employed Aristotelian empiricism to demand evidence. He advocated the literal interpretation of Scripture and systematic theology.[23]

II. THEOLOGY AS A SCIENCE

The history of the recovery of Aristotle paints the picture of how scholasticism came to maturity in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and specifically how Aquinas helped transform theology into a science. Aquinas's effect on theology may be understood best by contrasting it with a Platonic approach to theology.

Platonic Hermeneutics Without Aristotle

Early attempts to synthesize Platonism with Christianity gave rise to gnosticism. A popular Platonic doctrine claims that the material world is a less dignified and distant reflection of what is most real. Gnosticism took this to mean matter was evil or that one's licentious carnal life was disconnected from one's philosophical life. This lack of integrity drove Augustine away from gnostic Manichaeism. Gnosticism (from *gnosis*, "knowledge") gets its name from its claim that enlightenment comes by gaining secret knowledge from mystical experience. While orthodox Christianity attempted to filter Platonism through the Bible, it still had an adverse effect on biblical interpretation. Truth was seen as primarily beyond reason, distant, and accessible through mystical contemplation.

Early church contemplation was practiced through *lectio divina*. This process included reading Scripture (*lectio*), meditating on application (*meditatio*), prayerful response (*oratio*), and contemplative rest in God's presence (*contemplatio*). This practice aims at immersing oneself in the text "in order to be transformed by it

23. Carroll clarifies that Aquinas would not interpret the Bible literalistically: "Thomas was a firm adherent to the medieval [Augustinian] principle that 'Scripture is the interpreter of Scripture.' . . . As we can see in the first question of the *Summa,* Thomas would reject any kind of biblical literalism since, for him, the literal sense contains metaphors, similes, and other literary forms" (233).

and thus advance on a road towards greater holiness."[24] *Lectio divina* is actually a spiritual gem when used appropriately, but it emphasizes a mystical hermeneutic that encourages allegorical interpretation as exemplified in the devotional classics *Journey of the Mind to God* by Bonaventure, *Dark Night of the Soul* by St. John of the Cross, or *Interior Castle* by Teresa of Ávila. These works use heavy allegory with minimal Scripture and no exegesis. If ultimate truth was a distant reality, the goal in textual interpretation is to see the truer, more spiritual hidden meaning beyond the text. It is not hard to see its resemblance to gnosticism. Before Aquinas, "biblical exegetes operated in the intellectual context of Neoplatonism and sought, accordingly, to look for exemplar [allegorical] and final causality. The visible world and human history were viewed as symbols of spiritual realities known through illumination."[25] Allegorical interpretation and mysticism would last well into the medieval church. If biblical truths were so mysterious, the church would be reluctant to let commoners read the words of God for themselves. As Nicholas Healy explains:

> The visible surface of the text, its "literal sense," was regarded as of secondary importance compared with its invisible depths, for it was in the latter [that] the true meaning of the text lay, through which one might ascend towards God. The monks thus tended to read through or around the literal meaning of the words in order to discern their more significant "spiritual" meaning.[26]

Allegorical interpretation was introduced by the Jewish philosopher and Middle Platonist Philo of Alexandria in his work *Allegorical Interpretation.* As he tried to harmonize the Torah with Platonism, he would explain difficult passages of scripture with allegory. What Philo did for Hellenistic Judaism, Clement—also from Alexandria—did for Christianity. Philo's allegorical interpretation of Genesis was imitated by Clement of Alexandria, Basil of Caesarea, and Augustine. Augustine interprets Genesis 1:18, "Be fruitful and multiply," as referring to fruitfulness of mind:

> I do not see what objection there is to my thus interpreting the figurative words of your book. . . . If, therefore, we think of the natures of things not allegorically but literally, the word 'increase and multiply' applies to all creatures generated by seeds. But if we treat the text as figurative (which I prefer to think scripture intended . . .), then we find multitudes in the spiritual and physical creations (to which 'heaven and earth' refer); in both just and unjust souls (called 'light and darkness'); in the holy authors through whom the law is ministered (called 'the firmament' established solidly between water and water); in the association of people filled with bitterness ('the sea'); in the zeal of devoted souls ('the dry land'); . . . in spiritual gifts which manifest themselves for edification (the 'heavenly lights'); in affections disciplined through self-control ('the living soul').[27]

IF ULTIMATE TRUTH WAS A DISTANT REALITY, THE GOAL IN TEXTUAL INTERPRETATION IS TO SEE THE TRUER, MORE SPIRITUAL HIDDEN MEANING BEYOND THE TEXT. IT IS NOT HARD TO SEE ITS RESEMBLANCE TO GNOSTICISM.

With such allegorizing, any interpretation is possible. Indeed, Augustine himself repeatedly claims that there is a "diversity of true views" and his was "perhaps only one out of the many true interpretations."[28] With such eisegesis, one can easily allegorize the text in defense of one's personal agenda. There is a long history of doing just that.

There is a time and place for appropriate allegorical interpretation. We all do this when we apply "deliver

24. Carroll, 222.

25. Carroll, 223.

26. Nicholas M. Healy, "Introduction," *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to His Biblical Commentaries.* Ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 7; quoted in Carroll, 222.

27. Augustine, *Confessions,* trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), XIII.37.

28. Augustine, *Confessions*, XII.41–43.

me from my enemies" (Psalm 59:1) to our hard circumstances or personal sin. We abuse allegory when we read "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13) as an unconditional promise for success. However, when interpretations differ, who is to judge which interpretation is based on textual evidence? How do we assess whether a doctrinal argument is deductively valid or fraught with logical fallacies? It is precisely these questions which the early church could not answer that scholasticism would attempt to address.

Aristotelian Logic & Scientific Method

Aristotle's effect on biblical interpretation may be seen in his scientific method. Plato's distrust of sensory observation led to his school being overrun by skepticism. This problem reappears throughout history when philosophers propose a Platonic epistemology where knowledge of the truth depends primarily on mysticism, intuition, or inner reflection.

By contrast, Aristotle says that knowledge begins with observation and that proof demands concrete evidence. As Aquinas says, we start with what is most well known to our senses and move to what is less well known.[29] Applied to hermeneutics, interpretations of the Bible demand textual evidence and difficult passages are interpreted with clearer ones. With his use of Aristotle, Aquinas defended the literal interpretation of Scripture. "Thomas's position on the importance of the literal sense of Scripture puts him at odds with those who would see the text as merely a veil which had to be lifted in order to get at the inner and nobler spiritual message."[30] When handling difficult passages, one does not need to resort to allegory but to an even more rigorous handling of Scripture.

Both Plato and Aristotle agree that knowledge is better than mere opinion. What Aristotle makes clear is that knowledge is justified true belief. His scientific method requires proper justification based in evidence and demonstrated through logically valid arguments.[31]

29. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ* 1.2.3.

30. Carroll, 223.

31. See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* I.1.

When interpreting the Bible, interpretive claims must be justified by textual evidence and defended without logical fallacy. D.A. Carson's *Exegetical Fallacies* (1996) is an exercise in Aristotelian logic, encouraging theologians to form valid arguments.

Aristotle's logical method gives rise to scientific inquiry, which is why he is sometimes considered the father of science. According to Aristotle, a science is constituted by a subject, foundational principles, and demonstrated conclusions.[32] Knowledge starts with observation, so the first subject is the material world, and the first science is physics. Conclusions are drawn from premises, which may be the conclusions of prior arguments. This cannot go on forever, so there must be a set of first premises that are self-evident axioms. They are self-evident insofar as there are no more fundamental premises that exist, and so these starting points cannot be the conclusion of prior arguments. They are, however, provable with *reductio ad absurdum* arguments. The foundational principles of the first science, physics, are thus the self-evident axioms of logic: the law of identity, the law of non-contradiction, and the law of excluded middle.[33] Physics also depends on the principle of causality—all things have a cause (or explanation). Even God's existence is said by Aristotle to be uncaused necessary existence. Aristotle identified four causes: formal cause, material cause, efficient cause, and final cause. Proofs in physics start from premises (either axioms or empirical data) and move to demonstrated conclusions. Conclusions become the principles or subject of the next science in a cumulative order of sciences. The basic order of the sciences is physics, mathematics, metaphysics. Physics can be further divided into astronomy, chemistry, biology, and so on.

32. Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 72a.; Rollen E. Houser, "Essence and Existence in Ibn SÎná," in *The Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy,* eds. Richard C. Taylor and Luis Xavier López-Farjeat (London: Routledge, 2016), 213. Note that Ibn Sina is Avicenna. For more detail on the science of metaphysics and the order of the sciences, see John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2000).

33. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ* I.2.1.; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV.3.1005b23-24; IV.3.1005b19-20; V.6.1011b13-14; VII.17.1041a16–18; *Topics*, I.7.103a19-20; *On Interpretation* V.6.1011b13-14

From physics we can also learn about universals, essences, and God's existence, which becomes the concern of metaphysics as it studies *being* itself.[34] Aristotle himself called metaphysics theology, and Aquinas called metaphysics natural theology to distinguish it from sacred theology (i.e. systematic theology).[35]

Theology as a Science

Since the sciences are cumulative, sacred theology is natural theology that includes the Bible in its foundational principles. There is really no difference between "secular philosophy" and "Christian philosophy." Christian philosophy is either Christians doing philosophy or what systematic theology ought to be. Aquinas says that if a conclusion comes from human reason alone, it is philosophy; if it comes from reason and the Bible, it is sacred theology.[36] Theology is not parallel to philosophy but includes philosophy. Where modern theology does not use philosophy, it is handicapped. Without philosophy, theology risks losing its being *systematic*. It becomes unable to answer the most fundamental questions, often resulting in chronological snobbery, contradiction, or questioning long established orthodoxy.

How can sacred theology be considered a science? Aquinas answers:

> I answer that, sacred doctrine is a science. We must bear in mind that there are two kinds of sciences. There are some which proceed from a principle known by the natural light of intelligence, such as arithmetic and geometry and the like. There are some which proceed from principles known by the light of a higher science: thus the science of perspective proceeds from principles established by geometry, and music from principles established by arithmetic. So it is that sacred doctrine is a science because it proceeds from principles established by the light of a higher science, namely, the science of God and the blessed. Hence, just as the musician accepts on authority the principles taught him by the mathematician, so sacred science is established on principles revealed by God.[37]

As theology includes the fruit of philosophy, it verifies the unity of all truth. Discussions of the unity of faith and reason become almost laughable. Faith steps in temporarily as grace helps us not suppress the truth, but faith will eventually pass into direct knowledge as we see God face-to-face in the beatific vision (Ro 1:18; 1 Cor 13:13; 2 Cor 5:7; Heb. 11:1; Rev. 22:4-5). Both faith and reason aim at knowledge of truth. As Aquinas says, "God never proposes through the Apostles and the prophets anything that is contrary to what reason indicates, although He does propose what exceeds the power of reason to comprehend."[38] Seeing theology as subject to reason allows for rigorous doctrinal disputation. As William Carroll explains:

> Such argumentation [of doctrinal disputation] is only possible because *sacra doctrina* is truly a science: it is an intellectual whole in which one can discover necessary connections amongst its parts, even though a recognition of the ultimate truth of revelation depends on faith. . . . For Thomas faith perfects reason, so *sacra doctrina* can perfect all other sciences. Such perfecting is not an elimination or destruction of these sciences; it is rather a recognition that human reason has limits to its scope. One of Thomas's favorite phrases is applicable here: grace does not destroy nature but perfects it. . . . *Sacra doctrina* explores the new intelligibility of all reality as it is revealed by God, who is the beginning and the end. All knowledge based on reason alone can only provide an incomplete (but certainly not a false) view of reality.[39]

English Reformer Richard Hooker (1554–1600) says:

> Even though Scripture says that it contains all things necessary for salvation, "all things" cannot be construed to mean absolutely "all things," but

34. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I.1-2; Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, "Prologue."

35. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.9; X.7; *Physics* VIII.6; *Metaphysics* II.2.

36. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ* I.1.1.

37. Aquinas, *Summa Theolgiae* I.1.2.

38. Aquinas, *Questions Disputatae De Veritate* 14.10, ad 7; quoted in Carroll 229.

39. Carroll, 230–231.

> all things of a certain kind, such as all things which we could not know by our natural reason. Scripture does indeed contain all these things. However, it also presupposes that we first know and are persuaded of certain rational first principles, and building on that, Scripture teaches us the rest.[40]

IF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY IS THE RESULT OF TREATING THEOLOGY AS AN ARISTOTELIAN SCIENCE, WE SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISED TO SEE ARISTOTLE'S FINGERPRINTS ON DOCTRINES OF CLASSICAL THEISM AND CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY.

Thanks to Aquinas's defense of theology as an Aristotelian science, allegory and mysticism gave way to literal interpretation and systematic theology. "Aquinas's appropriation of Aristotle introduced a different perspective from which to examine God's Word. For Aquinas, human knowing is not possible without sense and imagination. Efficient and formal causality receive greater recognition. The world and history take on their own value; they are not just symbolic of a higher realm."[41] When philosophy is used properly in theology, it elevates theology to a science. It provides tools for developing systematic theology.

Aristotle's Theology

If systematic theology is the result of treating theology as an Aristotelian science, we should not be surprised to see Aristotle's fingerprints on doctrines of classical theism and Christian orthodoxy. It may come as a surprise how much of Aristotle's own theology influences how we articulate Christian doctrine.

Aristotle's opening line in his work on theology, the *Metaphysics*, is "All men by nature desire to know," and in the same section he clarifies that "all men suppose what is called wisdom to deal with the first causes."[42] So humans are naturally fulfilled in seeking wisdom, which is knowledge of the first causes. He then goes on to prove the existence of the First Cause, or God: "Evidently there is a first principle, and the causes of things are neither an infinite series nor infinitely various in kind… if there is no first there is no cause at all."[43] "The First Mover, then, of necessity exists; and in so far as it is necessary, it is good, and in this sense a first principle… without which the good is impossible, and that which cannot be otherwise but is absolutely necessary"[44]

Since all men by nature desire to know, and wisdom is in knowing causes, and God is the First Cause, or Unmoved Mover, then man's fulfillment is found in knowing God.

> The activity of intellect, which is contemplative, seems both to be superior in worth and to aim at no end beyond itself, and to have its pleasure proper to itself… It follows that this will be the complete happiness of man… But such a life would be too high for man . . . but [we] must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us; for even if we be small in bulk, much more does it in power and worth surpass everything.[45]

For Aristotle, the complete happiness of man is found in contemplating God. Even though this is impossible for finite humans, we ought to "strain every nerve" attempting to know God. In the end, Aristotle wonders "If there is any gift of the gods to men, it is reasonable that happiness should be god-given, and most surely god-given of all human things inasmuch as it is the best."[46] Aquinas comments on this passage saying, "It

40. Richard Hooker, *Divine Law and Human Nature: Book I of Hooker's Laws: A Modernization*, trans. W. Bradford Littlejohn, Brian Marr, and Bradley Belschner (Davenant Press, 2017), 81.

41. Matthew Lamb, "Introduction," *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, Thomas Aquinas (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1966), 6.

42. *Metaphysics* I.1

43. *Metaphysics* II.2.994a.

44. *Metaphysics* XII.7.1072b10.

45. *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7.1177b ff.

46. *Nicomachean Ethics* I.9.1099b11

is reasonable that happiness be the gift of the supreme God . . . that the ultimate end, happiness, should come to man from the highest power of all, the supreme God."[47] Aristotle certainly did not have the gospel, but he recognized God's "invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature. . . " (Romans 1:19-20).

Aristotle explains further that God is "immortal and eternal."[48] God is a mind, but he is not merely a transcendent force, like *logos* of the Stoics. "Life also belongs to God, for the activity of thought is life . . . God's essential actuality is life most good and eternal. We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this is God."[49] In *On The Heavens*, Aristotle says God is "living the best and most self-sufficient of lives."[50] For God, "It is clear then that there is neither place, nor void, nor time, [because he is] outside the skies. Hence whatever is there, is of such a nature as not to occupy any place, nor does time age it." This is because "in the absence of natural body there is no movement," i.e. God is immaterial. He is "immortal and divine" and "necessarily unchangeable." Classical theism and Christian orthodoxy have much in debt to those who pioneered treating theology as an Aristotelian science.

Is Theology Still a Science Today?

The purpose of seeing theology as a science is to do theology well. For Aquinas, the theologian's task is to preach faithfully and preserve orthodoxy: "Of these three offices, namely, to preach, to lecture, and to dispute, it is said in Titus 1:9, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to confute opponents."[51] Good theology requires good reason, and philosophy provides the tools to approach theology systematically. Biblicism is the result of keeping an Aristotelian emphasis on literal interpretation while losing Aristotelian methodology. Without the tools and questions philosophy provides, doctrines become compartmentalized, and fundamental questions are not even asked. Interpretation degrades into merely asking *what* the Bible says and not *why*. Theology loses its systematic coherence as theologians no longer understand the fundamental philosophical principles that knit the whole system together.

So what do we do now? To recover theology as a science, we need to stop treating *sola scriptura* as biblicism or chronological snobbery. It *should* be the case that new theology is better because it builds on the past. A biblicist hermeneutic neglects classical theism and is doomed to repeat old heresies. We need to not only renew an interest in the doctrines of classical theism but recover a scholastic method. If we appreciate Augustine and Anselm, do we imitate them? Do we just quote Calvin or do we imitate his ability to mine pagan philosophers for truth?

Theology today still bears the fruit of classical theism, but orthodox doctrines will dwindle if we do not maintain the scholastic method that gave birth to them. We must not treat theology as a collection of compartmentalized questions answered with a biblicist hermeneutic. We would do well instead, as we ask our deepest questions about God, to draw from the tools of philosophy, and treat theology as a science.

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47. Aquinas, *Commentary on Nicomachean Ethics,* bk I, Lecture 14.167.

48. Aristotle, *De Anima* III.5.430a20 ff., In *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

49. *Metaphysics* XII.7.1072b26 ff.

50. *On The Heavens* I.9.

51. Quoted in Ralph McInerny, ed. *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 15.

SYMPOSIUM

A Thomist: Quid Sit?

RYAN M. HURD

I once heard a lecture by quite a good Dominican intending to define what is a Thomist. His approach showed good sense and followed standard lines. Typically, we define, for example, an Aristotelian as someone who holds to Aristotelian principles, instead of Platonic ones (insofar as these principles are distinct and, more properly, contrary). Thus, we must identify what principle(s) someone must hold in order to have the essence of a Thomist–and something among the 24 Thomistic Theses seems like a good candidate initially.[1] There are at least two difficulties, however. One is how unified Thomists are with others (even, at times, with Scotists), which renders identifying something unique somewhat difficult. The other is how diversified Thomists have been among themselves, for excluding any of the noteworthies seems obviously wrong. In the end (if I recall), he argued that holding the real distinction between act and potency makes someone a Thomist. It is a common response, as is the real distinction between essence and being–not to mention others.

My own approach to this question is different, and perhaps more straightforward. Rather than define a Thomist based upon his current intellectual posture toward certain, especially principial propositions, I define him based upon his initial posture toward Thomas himself and his sayings or authorities–authorities which then eventually make a Thomist to hold these (and other) propositions. This approach has some resonance with that of John of St. Thomas, who identified two conditions of a true disciple of St. Thomas: "first, following his doctrine as true and catholic; and second, promoting it with all your powers."[2] Likewise for me, a Thomist is simply someone who follows Thomas. Or a bit more technically (I will be expanding this all throughout), it is someone who holds Thomas as trustworthy (*credibilis*) and so implicitly accepts his sayings as true, whereupon he habitually assents through them to various judgments or, by extension, propositions.

These approaches are not conflicting. One seems to follow how someone is called the son of another, in-

1. The 24 Thomistic Theses were an important group of principles which Thomists outlined as fundamental.

2. John of St. Thomas is quoting from Pope Urban V. John of St Thomas, *Cursus Theologicus* vol 1., *Approbatio* disp 2 art. 5. "... quae verum S. Thomae discipulum constituunt. Prima, sectari eius doctrinam ut veridicam et catholicam. Secunda, eam totis viribus ampliare."

tellectually speaking. A son is someone who has been generated (=taught) by another so as to have the same nature (=mind), which is why the act of teaching is sometimes called begetting, and the teacher is called a father and the student a son. This was the first approach identified above, again often used. We call someone, for example, an Aristotelian who holds the very part held by Aristotle of a certain contradiction; and then ultimately, who has the very principles which Aristotle acquired and reverted to again and again as his "firsts." Likewise, a Thomist–a true son of Thomas–is someone who, in the case of contrary opinions among scholastic masters, holds Thomas's part rather than e.g., Scotus's; and most ultimately, holds Thomas's principles which are concluding such opinions rather than their opposites, not to mention other propositions. In short, on this line, a Thomist is someone who *habet mentem Thomae*, who holds the mind of Thomas on the matter.

> **IN A WORD, A THOMIST THEN IS HE WHO *MAGISTRUM THOMAM SEQUITUR*, WHO FOLLOWS MASTER THOMAS; AND FOR WHOM THOMAS'S SAYINGS ARE THE AUTHORITIES (*AUCTORITATES*) WHICH ARE USED TO DETERMINE CONTRADICTIONS.**

My approach, by contrast, follows how someone is called the disciple of another. A disciple is someone who hears the voice of his master and willingly follows him wherever he goes. Intellectually speaking, when the master instructs him and says "this is true," the disciple listens and obediently responds, "indeed." On this line, a Thomist–a true disciple of Thomas–does not yet need to have "actually achieved in all [contradictions] the very mind of the Holy Doctor and understood him" and his reasons, as John of St Thomas reminds.[3] Instead, it is sufficient if he reads Thomas's assertions and, in acts of faith, asserts the same. In a word, a Thomist then is he who *Magistrum Thomam sequitur*, who follows Master Thomas; and for whom Thomas's sayings are the authorities (*auctoritates*) which are used to determine contradictions.

This approach I would propose as not just fruitful for defining a Thomist, but as in fact superior for doing so. Three "pay-offs" immediately come to mind which make this superiority plausible. First, this approach enables us to include with the great masters of Thomas's doctrine even the most junior Thomists who have not yet apprehended the principles of Thomas's system, but are still aware of his seemingly inexhaustible light and are dutifully following him. It likewise reflects the organic growth of that junior Thomist as his bearing toward Thomas increases and he assents thereby to more (and more principial) propositions, gradually acquiring *mentem Thomae* on all contradictions. Second, this approach sidesteps the problem of identifying the right principle(s) whose assent makes someone "in" or "out," but still leaves intact the insight that certain principles and not others are constitutive: everyone knows that a Thomist is different from a Scotist is different from a Suarezian based upon what each actually holds in certain and important cases. And finally third, it easily distinguishes a Thomist from someone else who shares some principles, e.g., even a Scotist (who would be defined by the same mode, *mutatis mutandis*). And indeed, this approach seems to align better with how, within the unified movement of scholasticism, medieval schools actually developed, viz., through listening to a certain master.

But what does this "following Thomas" really look like? Let me flesh out what I mean.

Imagine that you stand before the universe of all possible contradictions–say, to keep it manageable, just all contradictions involving God and so "housed" under *de deo uno et trino*. Your intellectual task is straightforward: determine each and every one of those contradictions as to its true part, and hold that part *as true* as firmly as possible. This of course is merely the scholastic task, if not the intellectual one.

Throughout your life, you have acquired many inclinations, some of them good and inclining to the true, and others bad and inclining to the false. But despite

3. John of St Thomas, *Cursus Theologicus* vol 1., *Approbatio* disp 2 art. 5. "Non ergo desinit verus esse Thomista, qui non in omnibus de facto assequitur mentem doctoris sancti euque intelligit."

A THOMIST, THEN, IS SOMEONE FACING THAT UNIVERSE, FIELDING AUTHORITIES FROM THOMAS, AND READILY BEING DETERMINED THROUGH THEM.

this, by nature you stand neutral to these contradictions and have, in each case, no inherent inclination either to the right or to the left. Moreover, although your everyday inclinations (*suspiciones*) and ultimately determined holdings (*opinio; assensus*) can and do have different sorts of motive causes or "pressures" which induce you to them, still intellectually speaking, there are only *two sorts of motives* to consider, to "allow yourself" to become determined through. The one is *rationes*, *arguments* made to the intellect and which make it to judge. The other is *auctoritates*, *authorities* (or quite roughly, prooftexts), sayings from someone who is trustworthy. These authorities ultimately make addresses to the will, which then constrains intellect to judge–rendering this assent the act which is natural faith or believing (*credere*). Scholastics call fielding arguments, proceeding through *rationes* (*proceditur per rationes*); and fielding "prooftexts," proceeding through *auctoritates* (*proceditur per auctoritates*). Thus in sum, as someone engaged in the scholastic task, you face this universe of contradictions and are fielding arguments and authorities which could determine your intellect, which could make you to hold or to assent to only one part of this contradiction as true.

A Thomist, then, is someone facing that universe, fielding authorities from Thomas, and readily being determined through them. The various sayings from Thomas's corpus arise in his mind and "populate" this part and not the other of the various contradictions: this saying from Thomas that God is populates the affirmative of this contradiction that he is and is not; this saying from Thomas that God is simple populates the negative of this contradiction that he is and is not composite; etc. In each case, a Thomist chooses to assent to the part merely because *thus saith St. Thomas*. In clichéd terms, a Thomist is someone for whom Thomas's sayings form the *sed contra* of every question. In terms more technical, he is someone who implicitly but then also explicitly assents to Thomas's sayings and holds *such* as representative of the true.

To be sure, how this works must be carefully explained; here, we must content ourselves with a gesture. When Thomas writes e.g., that God is simple, you must first apprehend the intellectual content (*intelligentia*; *sensus*) of this saying–the certain concept signified by the predicate; the judgment either composing or (as in this case) dividing that concept. When you have done this task (*interpretatio*, Thomas would call it) and have that judgment firmly in mind, now it is time to either *posit* that judgment in reality as true, or *remove it* from the field of facts as false–what Thomas often and also calls, *to judge* (*iudicare*), but what many today might call (anemically) identifying the truth value. However, for *this* judgment about *this* division, you do not reflect upon *rationes* or intellectual evidence for the division's truth and resonance with reality (e.g., that every composite requires a mixture of act and potency; but in God is only act). Instead, you reflect upon the saying from Thomas, particularly the fact that he it was who asserted this indeed to be–that Thomas himself had posited this division in reality as true. And knowing this, *you choose to trust Thomas and likewise posit the same division*; you then verbally respond and say, "God indeed is simple," and when asked for your argument why, admit, "because Thomas said that God being simple is the case." Doing this across the board for all contradictions outs you as a Thomist. You are indeed his *discipulus*, and he your *magister*.

This gesture has uncovered two major difficulties which every Thomist must resolve if he indeed wants to follow Thomas in the mode just outlined. Those difficulties are *interpreting* Thomas's sayings, and then *certifying* that he indeed posited or asserted such to be. Let us consider these in turn.

First, a Thomist must carefully *and rightly* interpret Thomas's sayings, to ensure that they are really relevant for the contradiction being considered. He must know that Thomas asserted indeed *this* proposition which

he has understood, rather than another which has the same form but a different understanding.

Not infrequently, a saying might seem relevant to the contradiction which you understand, but it involves another which you do not. The most common–or first realized–examples of this involve equivocal predicate terms. When trying to determine e.g., whether God is or is not powerful, you will easily find in Thomas many sayings that he is powerful (*est potens*). But before any of these is considered probative for the affirmative, you must ensure that your definition of power (*potentia*) matches Thomas's in that saying (and potency is said in many modes!).

> **A THOMIST, IF HE WOULD PROCEED THROUGH THOMAS'S SAYINGS AS HIS AUTHORITIES, MUST FIRST LEARN TO INTERPRET THEM, TO ACQUIRE *THOMAS'S* UNDERSTANDINGS FROM THEM ALL.**

This example is so simplistic, that one could underestimate how difficult Thomas's sayings are to interpret, and how easily he is abused and his sayings "forced" to argue something foreign to their intention. To better realize the difficulty, consider the fact that not only must you watch the definition signified by the predicate term, but you must also watch what lies behind the "is" of Thomas's propositions ("is" is also said in many modes!). Continuing with contradictions involving God, when Thomas *says* that God is simple, this is probative for the negative judgment that he is not composite. When he says that he is a rock, this would be probative for the affirmative that we are supported by him; when he says that he is our peace, this for that he makes us to have peace; when that he is just, sometimes only for that he does justice; when that he is merciful, usually for that he acts akin to a merciful man; when that he is knowledgeable (*est sciens*), only for that he has the certitude, not the conclusionality of knowledge (*scientia*); when that he is good, not for (as so usually in English) that he does/did something good to you, but sometimes for that he is not evil, sometimes for that he makes all goods, sometimes for (roughly) that all goods desired are found in him.

These examples are straightforward when compared to others. I list them only to insinuate the difficulty of interpreting Thomas, how pervasively the external form of his proposition belies its "meaning." This is despite the fact that Thomas writes *maximally formally*, as Cajetanus says, whereupon the external form of Thomas's sayings betray their "meaning" far more readily than that of, for example, patristic sayings. A Thomist, if he would proceed through Thomas's sayings as his authorities, must first learn to interpret them, to acquire *Thomas's* understandings from them all. Others will play at "prooftexting" for whatever understanding they have in mind and for which Thomas's words are a convenient match. Others will hijack witless words, force-feed them a meaning foreign to Thomas's intention, and take advantage of his name to hammer people to their own positions. A Thomist despises all of this, and instead *interprets*–something which Thomas also helps with, as he constantly clarifies the concept he intends, and also teaches, as he interprets texts, and alerts you to different senses of propositions, and so on. Still, even with Thomas's own crystalline clarity, the need to "determine his sense of the question" (a related mode of putting this) carries on.

Second, a Thomist must also evaluate Thomas's sayings, not all of which are created equal. Particularly, even after successfully interpreting, he must certify that Thomas indeed *asserted* this proposition–rather than e.g., just recited it as another's opinion.

This second difficulty is also important to take seriously and resolve, yet frequently overlooked. Reciting opinions held by others is quite common in philosophical tradition, as well as among the fathers. So too among scholastics and especially bachelor commentators on the *Sententiae*, the practice is not uncommon. An author takes a certain contradiction; but instead of determining it himself, he merely recites another's opinion regarding it–often without betraying that he has done so, and simply writing e.g., "that its affirmative is to be held as true." This mere recitation is easily mistaken as the author's own determination, but it is not; it is

another's opinion which is plausible (*probabilis*) given e.g., that he is trustworthy or otherwise notable.

This phenomenon means that even when you rightly interpreted Thomas's saying and have the same understanding as he, you must still continue to ensure that Thomas took this very judgment and *posited it* as so; that he *firmly assented* to it and understood reality so to be; that when he then uttered this proposition, it was his *firm assertion* or *sententia* (as scholastics would call it) about this contradiction. The proposition in question could be another's opinion, not Thomas's own. This happens more times (especially in his earlier *Sententiae* commentary) than many are aware of, let alone factor for (although great commentators of Thomas, such as Cajetanus, will occasionally point this out).

YOU MUST INTERPRET HIS SAYINGS AND APPREHEND THE COMPOSITIONS AND DIVISIONS IN HIS MIND; YOU MUST THEN EVALUATE AND ENSURE THAT THESE ARE HIS *FIRM ASSERTIONS* SIGNIFYING HIS OWN JUDGMENTS ABOUT THESE COMPOSITIONS AND DIVISIONS.

Or there is a different, but similar phenomenon to factor: the author gives his own epistemic "feelings" on the contradiction, but it is only his *opinio*, opinion; not his *sententia*, firm assertion. This practice occurs even more frequently among scholastics. An author takes a contradiction and, for whatever reasons, merely opines (=loosely holds) e.g., that its affirmative is true. Other masters then arise and evaluate respective arguments for contrary opinions (Thomas often does this), and identify one as *opinio magis probabilis*, the more plausible opinion given the actual argument (*ratio*) used. This identification is a laudable way-station along the path of discovering truth; but it is not the termination of that path: the question remains open, needing further determination. Only when an author has *firmly assented* to one only part does he give his *sententia*, his absolute determination about the contradiction. All scholastics, Thomas not excepted, engage in these and related practices *with the expectation that their readers evaluate things differently*: an opinion is only their "maybe so," whereas a *sententia* is their "definitely this."

A Thomist knows the difference between these things. Others will perform the task of interpreting a certain saying and finally apprehend the judgment in Thomas's mind–say, a certain composition signified by such. But he will then hastily assume (!) that Thomas (because he did utter this saying!) *posited* that composition, that he *actually himself* judged, and that his judgment was a *firm assent*. A Thomist knows that Thomas had much in his mind, seemingly innumerable compositions and divisions both; and that his mind "felt" different about them. His epistemic posture could be more neutral, yet he still uttered the proposition recitatively because it was the opinion of someone credible; it could be fairly favorable, and so he uttered the proposition plausibly (*probabiliter*) because he has some plausible reason (*probabiliss ratio*) for it. Or it could be locked solid and firm, whereupon he uttered the proposition definitively as his *sententia*. A Thomist knows the difference between these. And he evaluates Thomas's sayings properly so that he can assent to what Thomas actually assented to. He primarily proceeds through those sayings which are Thomas's *sententiae*, and only secondarily (and as appropriate) through those which are his *opiniones*; he favors commonplace treatments over those "out of the way"; he knows the difference between a *respondeo* (the response) and a resolution to an objection; etc.

Following Thomas, therefore, is not so simple a matter. You must interpret his sayings and apprehend the compositions and divisions in his mind; you must then evaluate and ensure that these are his *firm assertions* signifying his own judgments about these compositions and divisions. Only then can you proceed, properly and faithfully, through his authorities, and "ape" Thomas's judgments with your own–no need to have the whys and wherefores, only to trust. And if you choose to do this and have begun to be a Thomist, then you can be congratulated for achieving a notable state of knowledge, for now you possess even many compositions and divisions which you yourself have posited in reality.

And given that these judgments are true, your intellect has become highly resonant with reality itself.

Yet Thomas would be the first to inform you that this state of knowledge, yes laudable, is decidedly subpar. And everyone knows that it *is* subpar, which is why we despise anyone who says, "I just know *that* it is so; I don't have any idea why"; or who argues, "This just *is* the case because so-and-so says it is the case." Nobody likes a Thomist who continually says, "because Thomas says so."

> **HE DOES NOT MERELY ASSENT THROUGH THOMAS'S AUTHORITIES AND *LEAVE IT THERE*; RATHER, HE IMMEDIATELY REVERTS ALSO TO THOMAS'S *RATIONES*, EXPRESSED EXTERIORLY IN HIS ARGUMENTS.**

It is so subpar that Thomas himself even calls it *empty-headed*.[4] His reason for doing so is clear. Given that you proceeded through authorities, you were constrained to assent through something extrinsic to your intellect, under the force of your will and objects unique to it. Accordingly, although you do have judgments and perhaps even many, there is no intellectuality "behind" those judgments upon which you could reflect for evidence for (or even explanation of!) their truth. This is the emptiness which Thomas refers to: you currently lack *rationes*.

Nobody ought to assent through authorities *and leave it there*. And nobody wants to by nature: intellect still desires its own satisfaction, even when the will has drawn it forth and "pinned" it to one part. Indeed, this initial lack of intellectual satisfaction is why so many "intellectuals" today are unwilling to humble themselves and proceed through authorities at all, imagining themselves the more intellectually respectable for refusing this childlike trust! They can be praised for prizing reasons; but they know not how knowing works. They consider only what for a moment would be missing, and forget what would already have been gained. When someone refuses all authorities and proceeds through reasons alone (*per rationem solam*, as Anselm says), he does not yet know which part of the contradiction is true. Reasons pull him hither and thither. His intellect struggles under many doubts (*dubia*), which Aristotle reminds are so many chains impeding the progress toward finding truth. These doubts are intellectual fears; and fear is the mind killer. His intelligence is thus shackled, and he must find these reasons *while also still struggling* to know which part is even which. The scholastics knew that it is far better to first proceed through authorities and firmly hold a position upon the word of someone credible. And then, from that place of strength–intellectual quiet, not disturbance–you are best enabled to revert and begin to discover reasons (*invenire rationes*) bearing upon what you already know (through authorities) is the case.

And here is a greater secret. When you do proceed through authorities, you first search for precisely those reasons which motivated the intellect of the very person whose authority just constrained, by way of your will, your own intellect. This is the natural extension of what it is to assent through another's mind, viz., to have now those *rationes* in another's mind bearing upon your assent.

Such reasons are usually signified "within" the authority itself (again, quite roughly, a prooftext). Rarely does a great thinker say, "X *indeed is* Y," without continuing, "because Z." Before, you were not adverting to such a reason; you were assenting merely because he had asserted something *to be*, not through his argument for it being. Yet now is the time to revert to his reason and assent through it; the reason(s) which once determined his intellect ought now also determine yours. Indeed, this is the exact process which all bachelor students followed when they commented on Lombard's *Sententiae*, a sort of mind meld with the fathers: facing a new contradiction, they first assented to one part through the *auctoritas* of e.g., Augustine; and then they assented to the same through the very *ratio* of Augustine, which the Master of the Sentences often highlights within the quotation he used.

4. Thomas, *Quod* IV q 9 a 3 resp. "Sed *vacuus* abscedet."

What then of a Thomist? He does not merely assent through Thomas's authorities *and leave it there*; rather, he immediately reverts also to Thomas's *rationes*, expressed exteriorly in his arguments. And the Thomist finds them in abundance, for his master sends none away empty. Immature disciples Thomas first leads through authorities, so as to reveal to them truths and remove from them errors; but more mature disciples in his school, Thomas continues to teach–now "not for removing error" and determining contradictions alone, "but for instructing his hearers so that they are led unto the *intellectuality* of the truth which they believe." Thus, Thomas gives many "*rationes* investigating the root of the truth" which you discovered through an authority–and supremely, *rationes* which "make you to scientize as to how such is true." None "leave empty" who trust him; everyone "acquires something of *scientia* and something of *intelligentia*" both.[5]

ACTUALLY FOLLOWING HIM AS YOUR MASTER MEANS PROPERLY INTERPRETING HIS SAYINGS; VARIOUSLY EVALUATING THEM AS *SENTENTIAE, OPINIONES,* ETC; AND APPROPRIATELY PROCEEDING THROUGH THESE AUTHORITIES TO DETERMINE CONTRADICTIONS.

The Angelic Doctor was not in the business of training parrots. Actually following him as your master means properly interpreting his sayings; variously evaluating them as *sententiae*, *opiniones*, etc; and appropriately proceeding through these authorities to determine contradictions. But it also means reverting to the *rationes* in Thomas's mind which bore upon the judgments "behind" these sayings–*rationes* which are now scattered throughout his entire corpus and which now must be carefully collected.

Yet again there are difficulties, and following Thomas is not so simple a matter as "collecting" might suggest. There are reasons, and then also reasons. There are various reasons merely showing *that* (ὅτι; quia), and then the reason or explanation why (διότι; propter quid) the moon is eclipsed, we recall. There are *rationes cognoscendi*, arguments for knowing something to be; but then *rationes essendi*, reasons or causes why or how something actually is. There are reasons explaining how something is suitable (*rationes convenientiae*), which lack probative force and indeed assume that something was already proved; and then actually probative reasons, those making something plausible (*rationes probabiles*) or even demonstratively certain (*rationes demonstrativae*). And then again there is the formal reason or cause why something is (*ratio formalis*). Others will confuse these; but a Thomist understands the difference between one ratio versus another, and what the difference amounts to. Others will mistake what *ratio* Thomas is actually giving him; but a Thomist knows what he has received–when Thomas was showing something fitting, but not arguing; when he was making something plausible, leading you by the hand; when he was demonstrating, locking you down; when he was explaining; etc.

But here especially intellectual differences spring up between the disciples of other masters and the Thomist who draws from Thomas's well. Admittedly, some differences already arose from proceeding through Thomas's authorities, rather than those of others. It is true that sometimes another master holds an opinion contrary to the one held by Thomas; and his disciple and a Thomist become distinguished as each proceeds through his respective authorities and thus assents to opposite parts. But these differences, real and sometimes important, are nevertheless minimal. Thomas is called *doctor communis*, the universal teacher for good reason. In the vast majority of cases and certainly the most important ones, Thomas's opinion is the same as that of the fathers. Indeed, it is most often the same as that of the other and greatest scholastics masters. You would be hard pressed to find Thomas and, for exam-

5. Thomas, *Quod* IV, q. 9, a. 3, resp. "Quaedam vero disputatio est magistralis in scolis, non ad removendum errorem, sed ad instruendum auditores ut inducantur ad intellectum veritatis quam credunt, et tunc oportet rationibus inniti investigantibus veritatis radicem et facientibus scire quo modo sit verum quod dicitur. Alioquin, si nudis auctoritatibus magister quaestionem determinet, certificabitur quidem auditor quod ita est, sed nihil scientiae vel intellectus acquiret sed vacuus abscedet."

ple, Bonaventura, on opposite sides of any contradiction; and surely it is almost impossible to find a "common opinion among scholastics" which has Thomas as its opponent. All this is precisely why Pope Leo XIII presented Thomas as the model for all to follow, as the surest guide to the truth found wide and writ large, and the safest guide to the truth yet cloaked in shadow. But this prompts the question: if following Thomas and proceeding through his authorities so regularly terminates in the position commonly held by anyone who matters, then how does following *him* rather than another master still make for any great difference?

The response is *the rationes* which Thomas gives and which a Thomist receives from his authorities, reasons which can greatly differ from those of other masters. Intellectual differences especially accrue not regarding which part of the contradiction is held, but over the reasons bearing on that part.

For an initial example, Thomas sometimes differs from other masters regarding the formal reason for something. Keeping with doctrine of God, a good example is the formal reason why God is present in all creatures, including all places. Scholastic masters do not disagree over whether God indeed *is* or instead *is not* present; but they greatly differ over *why* or *on account of what* is this so. Some masters–Scotus, most notably–even reject the possibility of giving a formal reason, and hold that the affirmative of this contradiction can only be shown through supernatural authorities–and never explained. Others accept the possibility of explaining it, but identify as the explanation e.g., God's infinity. As for Thomas, he not only holds that God indeed is present (as do all), and not only accepts the possibility of explaining why (as do most); but he explains that God is present *particularly because* he efficiently causes all creatures to be, and as Aristotle reminds, every efficient cause or agent is in its patient inasmuch as it is a patient. As a result, the disciples of all schools will conclude from their respective authorities that God indeed is present; but their understandings as to why or how will greatly differ. By contrast to many others, a Thomist will understand God's presence after the fashion of the agent's causal "touch" of its patient or recipient–a formal reason which, in the history of this doctrine, has a unique attachment to the Thomist school, given that it is Thomas's *ratio formalis*.

But besides formal reasons, likely even more important are Thomas's demonstrative or scientific ones–inducing *scientia* about the proposition and particularly its truth. To be sure, not every natural truth, and no supernatural one can have such a ratio *demonstrativa*; for such propositions, you can only show their truth proceeding through authorities, particularly supernatural ones. But some truths (and very many) can have such *rationes*–even and firstly, the truth of this proposition that God is, as Thomas most carefully shows (although admitting that it receives only *ratio quia*, not *propter quid*) against those who hold otherwise and so refuse to render theology scientific.

For every truth which can have such a *ratio* (otherwise said, for every proposition which is demonstrable), Thomas is uniquely discontent to proceed through authorities alone; for intellectually speaking, arguments from authorities are the weakest *rationes*. Rather, he wants also to proceed through *rationes*, filling the intellect with its fodder unto the maturation of its judgment. But not just any *rationes*!; Thomas wants supremely the prized *rationes demonstrativae*, whereupon the sort of knowledge called *scientia* is had. Thus, throughout his career, Thomas searches for such a reason in favor of each truth, and indeed *many* such and better and better ones (e.g., from higher principles) in favor of one and the same truth. This is why he often critiques the *rationes* of other masters as insufficient (*ratio est insufficiens*), being only (at most) *probabiles* and yielding *opinio*, not *scientia*. (Similarly, later Thomist commentators frequently defend Thomas's *rationes* precisely as sufficient–defending him against the withering fire of later scholastic masters such as Scotus.)

Although this goal of *scientizing* is certainly shared with other masters, Thomas pursues it with unique intensity and ability, and so also results. Consequently, someone who especially follows Thomas will, after proceeding through his authorities and then reverting to his *rationes*, become more and more *sciens*, scientific toward the proposition. And being so scientific likely distinguishes a Thomist most from the disciples of oth-

er masters, e.g., Bonaventura, who intend other *rationes* or not as much these *rationes*. It is not so much which part of the contradiction is held, but Thomas's unique road to it which distinguishes a Thomist from those who follow the roads of others. There are signs of this distinction. A Thomist finds his intellect increasingly strong about propositions: it is the nature of *scientia*. He thus often "codes" as more "dogged" about things than others. A Thomist is enabled to not just prove, but even demonstrate to others that *this part* of the contradiction is true, as he proceeds from principles through premises certainly unto such as his conclusion. He thus is especially "argumentative." And with *scientia* making him so inflexible, a Thomist is equipped to handle *dubia*, the intellectual doubts of those who are not yet determined; or even the objections of those who hold the opposite part. He thus reads as quietly confident to some and aggressive to others.

Of course, *scientia* (involving conclusions) is not everything; there is also *intelligentia* or understanding, involving principles. And through Thomas's *rationes*, his disciples "acquire something of *scientia* and something of *intelligentia*" both.[6] As the Thomist collects Thomas's *rationes*, he begins to discover principles and have knowledge of them inasmuch as they are such. He begins to see these principles for what they are, even as he also experiences them for what they can "do" regarding other propositions concluded in Thomas's system. Thus Thomas gradually unfolds his own and entire mind into another–something which he was given the grace to marvelously do.

And this returns us to our beginning, where I flagged in fact two approaches to defining what is a Thomist. The one defines a Thomist as someone who held certain principles–principles which are variously identified, as one tries to navigate between differentiating a Thomist from e.g., a Scotist, versus unifying or exhibiting the unity among Thomists who often differ among themselves (even regarding more principial propositions). The other approach, which we have followed and expanded throughout, defines a Thomist as someone who holds Thomas as trustworthy and his sayings as authorities for determining contradictions, and then reverts to Thomas's *rationes* as they bear upon these determinations. It now appears that the former approach merely defined the end, and the latter the beginning of a Thomist's life, as someone first encounters Thomas and thence proceeds from darkness to Angelic light.

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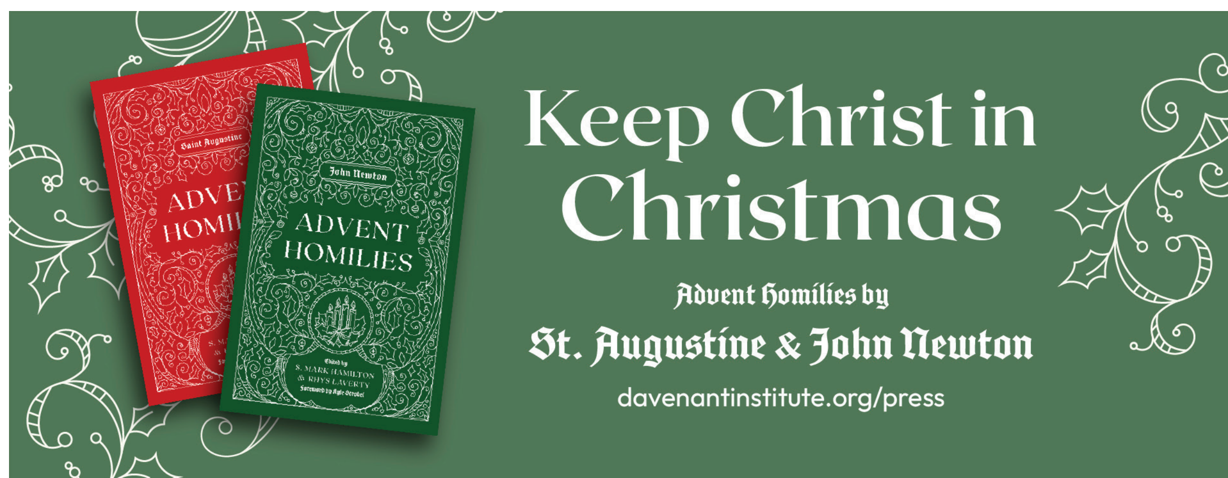
6. Thomas, *Quod* IV, q. 9, a. 3, resp. "...sed nihil scientiae vel intellectus acquiret sed vacuus abscedet."



SYMPOSIUM

Deus Est or Deus ex Machina?: How René Descartes Rescued Anselm's Ontological Argument From Thomas's Critique

NATHAN JOHNSON

Anyone who has encountered Anselm's ontological argument for God's existence probably felt like he was wrestling with a chimera or staring at an image that's always changing. From Anselm's contemporary Gaunilo to Thomas Aquinas to David Hume and Immanuel Kant, philosophers through the ages have disputed the internal logic of Anselm's claim that God's existence logically follows merely from the definition of God. Thomas's critiques are some of the more famous and devastating, given that he and Anselm share the same basic premises about the nature of perfection and the nature of God (not so for some of Anselm's more modern detractors). But what may perhaps be surprising to many readers is that the strongest defense of Anselm in the face of Thomas's critique comes not from a medieval, but from René Descartes: the very philosopher many people call the father of modernity. While many people blame Descartes for the loss of medieval scholasticism and the beginning of all the ills of modern thought—whether rightly or wrongly we do not have the space to adjudicate here—an examination of his *Meditations on First Philosophy* will show that he was one of history's staunchest defenders of Anselm's argument—while not mentioning Anselm by name—and he did so through the use of Thomas's own arguments for the existence of God and the traditional scholastic categories of objective and formal existence.

ANSELM'S ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

In his *Proslogion* Anselm famously attempts to understand by reason what he grasps by faith—namely the nature of God. In his opening prayer, he says, "I do not

seek to understand so that I may believe, but I believe so that I may understand."[1] He then sets out to understand that God exists and that he is what Christians believe him to be, arguing that the knowledge of the latter logically entails the former.[2] God can be defined as "that than which nothing greater can be thought."[3] Of course, Anselm recognizes that to be able to conceive of something doesn't necessarily entail its existence, for the artist can conceive of a painting and never bring it into existence. Yet it cannot be denied that even the fool who says in his heart "there is no God" can understand the concept of God as "that than which no greater can be thought," and thus have the true concept of God in his understanding. From here, all Anselm needs to prove is that to have God in the understanding as "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" *does* necessitate his actual existence, unlike the painter and his painting. He does this by reference to the definition itself, for if this thought exists only in the understanding, "it is possible to think of it existing also in reality, and that is greater."[4] Since existence in reality is greater than mere existence in the understanding, "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" must exist in reality for it to be greater than any other thing that can be thought.[5] Further, it is impossible to think of God as not existing insofar as someone truly understands that which God is, for God "is of such a kind of existence that he cannot be thought not to exist."[6] Anselm's argument is elegant, for he starts with a definition of the mind—what can be conceived—and by this starting point, argues that the mind's ability to conceive provides a foundation of proof for God's actual existence. Or, to put it another way: to understand who God is entails that he most certainly exists.

ANYONE WHO HAS WRESTLED WITH ANSELM'S PROOF MUST AFFIRM THAT HE HAD A DIZZYING INTELLECT.

Anyone who has wrestled with Anselm's proof must affirm that he had a dizzying intellect. Often, I find this proof to be like those ambiguous images that look one way and then suddenly look like something else, alternating between two perspectives that render each unstable and hard to keep fixed in one's sight. On certain days, the proof seems unassailable, while on other days, it seems incredibly flimsy and almost impossible to grasp, depending merely on word games. Many theologians have tried to dismantle Anselm's argument, while others vehemently defend its logical soundness, even if it doesn't always seem persuasive. One of the most famous critiques of Anselm's argument is by Thomas in *Summa Theologica* Part 1, Question 2, Article 1.

THOMAS'S CRITIQUE OF ANSELM'S ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Thomas asks whether God's existence is self-evident, articulating Anselm's position in Objection 2 before rejecting it. First, Thomas argues that while the proposition *God exists* is self-evident in itself—for the predicate "is" is the same as the subject "God" since God is "self-subsistent being"—it is not self-evident to us because we do not know the essence of God, and thus we require things better known to us—God's effects—to aid us in our knowledge of God.[7] Second, Thomas argues that man's innate knowledge of God is only knowledge of God in "a general and confused way"—such as God being man's true happiness, which

1. Anselm, *Proslogion*, trans. Benedicta Ward, in *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm with the Proslogion* (New York: Penguin, 1973), 244.

2. Some argue that Anselm isn't strictly speaking providing a rational *proof* for God's existence as much as a rational articulation of the nature of God, demonstrating that who God is entails his own existence. But the difference between *proof* and *rational articulation* may be so slight as to be irrelevant.

3. Anselm, *Proslogion*, 244.

4. Anselm, *Proslogion*, 244-245.

5. Anselm, *Proslogion*, 245. Kant argues that Anselm fails here because existence is not a quality that partakes of greater or less (one either exists or does not exists), and thus God's perfection doesn't entail existence. But Anselm defeats this critique by arguing that God *necessarily exists*; since nothing else exists necessarily, one can assert that necessary existence is greater than mere existence, and thus the argument from perfection still stands. To see a deeper explanation of how Anselm defeats Kant's critique, see: Kenneth Himma, "Anselm: Ontological Argument for God's Existence" in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. https://iep.utm.edu/anselm-ontological-argument/.

6. Anselm, *Proslogion*, 246.

7. Thomas, *ST.,* I, q. 2, a. 1.

all men desire, although man may not define happiness as God and thus not know him clearly and distinctly.[8] Having established this, Thomas then argues that Anselm's argument fails, for even if everyone understood that God signifies "that than which nothing greater can be thought," it doesn't follow that "what the name signifies exists actually, but only that it exists mentally."[9] In other words, the gap between "actual existence" (formal existence) and "mental existence" (objective existence/thought) is too great. To be able to conceive of something (even God) does not necessitate that it actually exists, but merely that it exists in the mind. Thus, in order for the ontological proof to work—according to Aquinas—it must be shown that the very ability to conceive of God necessitates his actual existence, thus bridging the gap between thought and "actual existence." Anselm, Thomas claims, is unable to bridge this gap merely through the definition of God, for the definition itself is only grasped in terms of its "existing mentally" unless it has already been proven that "that than which no greater thing can be thought" exists actually, which would be circular, being the very thing he set out to prove. Thus, in order to bridge this gap between thought and actual existence, it is required to investigate the cause of thought. Or to put it another way, the actual existence of God must be shown to be the source of one's understanding of God as "that than which nothing greater can be conceived." Enter René Descartes to bridge the gap.

DESCARTES' GEOMETRIC SCAFFOLDING

In his famous *Meditations on First Philosophy*, René Descartes sets out to prove the existence of God and the soul by demonstrable reasoning that "has no other source but [the] mind."[10] He does not do this because he thinks faith and Scripture are insufficient for belief in God, however. In his prefatory letter to the faculty of the Sorbonne, Descartes affirms that for believers, it is enough to believe in God by the gift of faith and that the primary foundation for belief in God is Holy Scripture; in this sense, he is right in line with Anselm.[11] Nevertheless, he maintains that such arguments will not persuade the unbeliever because it will be deemed to be circular—Holy Scripture having its authority by the inspiration of the God it attests to be true.[12]

> **IN ORDER TO ESTABLISH THE MOST EPISTEMOLOGICALLY CERTAIN FOUNDATION FOR HIS PROOF, DESCARTES BEGINS BY TEARING DOWN EVERYTHING THAT CAN BE DOUBTED.**

The first major step in Descartes' proof lies in his methodological doubt. In order to establish the most epistemologically certain foundation for his proof, Descartes begins by tearing down everything that can be doubted. Whatever remains can be used as the starting point, for it must be self-evident, non-contradictory, and impossible to call into question. If—as Descartes claims—God and the soul are "the most certain and evident of all possible objects of knowledge for the human intellect," then it follows that knowledge of these things rests on the most certain and evident premises.[13] To find these certain and evident premises, Descartes doubts everything that can be doubted. By doing this, he creates something akin to the common notions, definitions, and postulates in geometry—foundational ideas from which he can build all knowledge.

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8. Thomas, *ST.,* 1, q. 2, a. 1, ad 1.

9. Thomas, *ST.*, 1, q. 2, a. 1, ad 2.

10. Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge: 1986), 3.

11. It must be noted that Descartes had already written his *Discourse on Method*, where he is a staunch critic of the obscurities of late medieval scholasticism and what he saw to be a jargon-filled method that obscures more than it reveals. This has caused many to embrace a more Straussian reading of *Meditations*, arguing that Descartes' letter to the Sorbonne and attempt to prove the existence of God and the soul is a mere ploy to appease those in power by his subject matter while actually attempting to undermine traditional beliefs through his new method. I do not find this interpretation compelling, for it rests on too many unprovable assumptions; at the end of the day, the written text is the final judge of its own arguments.

12. Descartes, *Meditations*. It should be noted here that Descartes in a few sentences launches what will become one of the classic criticisms of modern presuppositional apologetics—that while it is true that Scripture is the foundation of the knowledge of God, appealing to it to prove God's existence to unbelievers is ineffectual, regardless of whether or not it is making use of a virtuous or vicious circle of reasoning. Of course, presuppositional apologetics also makes use of the transcendental argument for God, which Descartes briefly takes up in "Meditation Five"—albeit in only one of its iterations.

13. Descartes, *Meditations*, 11.

While his senses tell him that he is by the fire and his hands are out in front of him, he notes that his senses could be deceiving him, or he might be insane or dreaming.[14] Simply having an experience doesn't guarantee that what one is sensing is objectively real. Nevertheless, the objects that one's mind sees—even those in dreams—seem to be drawn from things outside of the self, which can be reduced to several classes of things: corporeal nature, extension, shape, quantity (size and number), place, and time—the things that are the most simple and general from which all composite things derive.[15] The question, then, is two-fold: 1) can the mind be trusted to know anything about these classes (such as the sum of two and three)? and 2) from whence could our knowledge of these things come (either from knowledge of self or knowledge of something outside the self)? This second question is the hinge on which Descartes' ontological proof turns.

SIMPLY HAVING AN EXPERIENCE DOESN'T GUARANTEE THAT WHAT ONE IS SENSING IS OBJECTIVELY REAL.

While it may be the case that one can trust one's mind to have objective knowledge of these things, one cannot be *certain* that the mind isn't deceived. If there is no God and all is ordered by chance, then the person may be "so imperfect as to be deceived all the time," or at least has no certainty that he is not deceived about even the most fundamental things.[16] But supposing that there is a God, one could posit that the God is a "malicious demon" that has deceived the mind and "ensnared" the judgment so that the senses cannot be trusted.[17] In either case, one can suppose that all opinions gained from sensory experience could be false or imaginary.[18]

It must be noted that many people have misinterpreted Descartes' claims and aims on this point. Descartes does not attempt to *prove* that knowledge from sense experience is false or imaginary, nor does he show that it is even reasonable to reject empirical knowledge; rather, he notes that knowledge derived from the senses produces "highly probable opinions" that he must assume are false to ensure that he doesn't unwittingly fall into holding premises that are attained through "habitual opinion" rather than clear and evident proof.[19] Descartes recognizes that in the temporal order of knowledge, everyone comes to their most certain conclusions by means of the senses.[20] He even goes so far as to say that if the only cause to doubt empirical knowledge is the reality of a deceiving God, then this reason for doubt "is very slight."[21] In this sense, Descartes does not reject empirical knowledge as a means of knowing, nor does he claim that empirical knowledge is by its own nature noetically suspect. Rather, he asserts that through empirical knowledge, one cannot know for certain that he is not deceived.[22] If this is the case, then knowledge not contingent on the senses is required to justify one's trust in empirical knowledge, and this form of knowing would then be considered more certain and more foundational, even if it is not the ordinary means one uses to come to the knowledge of the truth.[23] Furthermore, he clearly states that the benefit of his method isn't that it proves the existence of external reality, for "no sane person has ever seriously doubted these things."[24] Rather, he seeks to show that knowledge of God and the self is even more certain than knowledge of external reality.[25] In this way, Descartes argues for the priority of the mind both as a

14. Descartes, *Meditations*, 13.

15. Descartes, *Meditations*, 14.

16. Descartes, *Meditations*, 14. This is a precursor to one of the most effective arguments against Atheistic Darwinism, for if our senses and mind are only designed to help us survive, then we have no confidence that the senses and mind can lead us to anything intrinsically true, but only to ideas that are useful regardless of their truth value.

17. Descartes, *Meditations*, 15.

18. Descartes, *Meditations*, 15.

19. Descartes, *Meditations*, 15.

20. Descartes, *Meditations*, 12.

21. Descartes, *Meditations*, 25.

22. Descartes, *Meditations*, 12. In this, he seems to reject the category of intuitive knowledge of first principles by means of the internal common sense, or he at least restricts this kind of knowledge to few categories.

23. In this way, *a priori* reason is logically prior to experience, even if empirical knowledge is temporally prior to *a priori* knowledge in the order of how we come to know things.

24. Descartes, *Meditations*, 11.

25. Descartes, *Meditations*, 11.

means of certain knowledge and also as what is most central to the essence of a human being.[26]

> **WE MUST CONSIDER THE MIND ITSELF, SPECIFICALLY HOW IT ARRIVES AT CERTAIN THOUGHTS AND WHETHER ANY OF THESE THOUGHTS CAN BE SAID TO BE PRODUCED FROM SOMETHING OUTSIDE THE MIND.**

Having assumed his methodological doubt, he sets out to find anything "certain and unshakeable" on which he can build his proof.[27] In brief succession, he proves he exists,[28] that he is "a thinking thing,"[29] and that his knowledge of his own mind is greater than the knowledge derived from his senses, for it is the mental act of "judging" and "the scrutiny of the mind" that is more "clear and distinct" than the external knowledge of objects derived from the senses.[30] If this be the case, then even if what we experience with our senses is not real, our knowledge of how the mind functions and acts toward that stimuli is certain; thus, our knowledge of the mind is more certain than the knowledge of external physical phenomena.[31] Therefore, to determine whether anything exists outside of the mind, we must consider the mind itself, specifically how it arrives at certain thoughts and whether any of these thoughts can be said to be produced from something outside the mind. Regardless of whether one is persuaded by Descartes' argument for the knowledge of the mind being more clear and distinct than empirical knowledge, his following argument from causation has the greatest bearing on Thomas's critique of Anselm, for here he explores the causes for one's innate ideas, seeking to disprove Thomas's claims that God isn't known clearly and distinctly, that the idea of God isn't innate, and that the ontological proof is logically invalid. He does this with the aid of two of Thomas's proofs for God's existence: namely, the arguments from efficient cause (proof 2) and from perfection (proof 4).[32]

DESCARTES' ANSWER TO THOMAS

At this point in the proof, Descartes has established several premises: 1) he exists as a thinking thing; 2) knowledge acquired by means of the mind alone is more certain than knowledge contingent on sense perception; 3) knowledge of the mind itself is clearer and more certain than knowledge of external phenomena; and 4) "Whatever [one] perceive[s] very clearly and distinctly is true."[33] From here, Descartes swiftly moves to his conclusion that God exists by means of a proof that shares features of Anselm's "ontological argument" and Thomas's various arguments from causation.

In order to prove from these premises that God exists, Descartes begins by delineating three categories of ideas: 1) innate ideas; 2) adventitious ideas—ideas that seem to come from outside the self; and 3) invented ideas.[34] Insofar as ideas exist solely within the mind and do not refer to things outside of the self, then they cannot be considered false. But the activity of judgment seeks to determine whether "the ideas which are in me resemble, or conform to, things located outside me."[35] Invented ideas are sourced within the creative powers of the mind and cannot be judged to resemble things located outside the self. Adventitious ideas seem to come from outside the self and are known empirically but—so far in the chain of reasoning—cannot be proven to correspond to reality.[36] By this, Descartes means that while we have a base intuition that our adventitious ideas correspond to external reality, this cannot be proven by a faculty as clear and certain as "the natural light," by which he means his power of reason according to self-evident laws of logic, such as

26. It is not sufficient to challenge his reasoning by saying that his methodological doubt assumes already the existence of himself or things outside of his mind; this doubt is a precondition for his *method* to establish his premises, but not a precondition for the premises themselves.

27. Descartes, *Meditations*, 16.

28. Descartes, *Meditations*, 17.

29. Descartes, *Meditations*, 18.

30. Descartes, *Meditations*, 21-22.

31. Descartes, *Meditations*, 24.

32. Thomas, *ST*, I, q. 2, a. 3.

33. Descartes, *Meditations*, 24.

34. Descartes, *Meditations*, 26.

35. Descartes, *Meditations*, 26.

36. Descartes, *Meditations*, 26-27.

the law of identity or non-contradiction or the excluded middle, or the power of reason operating purely on things that are beyond doubt.[37] Adventitious ideas are not "clear and distinct" like those we come to know through the natural light. And even if our adventitious ideas did originate from something external to the self, it does not follow that we can be certain our ideas rightly correspond to the object itself.[38] Hence, to be certain that God exists, Descartes must also prove that the idea of God is innate and thus can be known clearly and distinctly by the natural light of reason alone.

...THERE MUST BE AN EFFICIENT CAUSE FOR EVERY IDEA WITHIN THE MIND.

Before proving the innate idea of God, Descartes proves the existence of God through an argument from causation, the structure of which is similar to Thomas's argument for God through efficient cause, even though the focus of the arguments is different. In short, there must be an efficient cause for every idea within the mind. To establish this, he appeals to the scholastic distinction between objective and formal reality. Objective reality refers to the mental impression or idea caused by an object. Formal reality refers to the actual object that causes the idea. Every idea contains an "objective reality" that corresponds to the formal reality of the thing itself so that whatever "greatness" or reality is within the formal reality of the object, that greatness or reality exists "objectively" within the mind to some extent.[39] With these categories, Descartes establishes important rules of causation: 1) "there must be at least as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in the effect of that cause"[40]; 2) something cannot arise from nothing; 3) what is "more perfect" or "contains more reality" cannot come from something less perfect or with less reality.[41] This leads to the important conclusion: "In order for a given idea to contain such and such objective reality, it must surely derive it from some cause which contains at least as much formal reality as there is objective reality in the idea," otherwise the idea contains something that emerged from nothing, which is impossible.[42]

It is not enough to reply that objective ideas can arise from other ideas, for "eventually one must reach a primary idea, the cause of which will be like an archetype which contains formally and in fact all the reality or perfection which is present objectively or representationally in the idea," lest there be an infinite regress.[43] This cause must have formal reality, for "the formal mode of being belongs to the causes of ideas [. . .] by their very nature."[44] Hence, the foundational cause for any objective idea must be a formal reality that is equal to or greater in perfection than the idea, whether that formal reality is the mind itself or something external to it.[45] Since this is self-evidently true, Descartes can establish another key premise: "If the objective reality of any of my ideas turns out to be so great that I am sure the same reality does not reside in me, either formally or immanently, and hence that I myself cannot be its cause, it will necessarily follow that I am not alone in the world, but that some other thing which is the cause of this idea also exists."[46]

From here, it logically follows that there must be a formal cause outside of the self that accounts for the idea of God. Descartes' argument seems to make use of an argument from perfection, similar in structure to Thomas's argument from perfection while differing in focus and application. While other ideas might possibly be construed to originate from the self, the idea of God certainly cannot formally exist within the self because God is more perfect than the self.[47]

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37. Descartes, *Meditations*, 27.
38. Descartes, *Meditations*, 27.
39. Descartes, *Meditations*, 28.
40. Descartes, *Meditations*, 28.
41. Descartes, *Meditations*, 28.
42. Descartes, *Meditations*, 29.
43. Descartes, *Meditations*, 29.
44. Descartes, *Meditations*, 29.
45. Descartes, *Meditations*, 29.
46. Descartes, *Meditations*, 29.
47. Descartes, *Meditations*, 31. It must be noted that he does not persuasively argue that all corporeal elements could be sourced in the self. In fact, he almost undermines his own argument that he can only be certain of being a thinking thing, for he admits that if he were solely mind, corporeal elements of extension, shape, position, and movement cannot exist formally within him. Yet,

THIS IDEA OF GOD IS FAR GREATER AND MORE PERFECT THAN ANY HUMAN BEING, SO IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR THESE IDEAS TO FORMALLY ORIGINATE IN THE HUMAN MIND.

At this point, he offers a definition of God consistent with traditional understanding, but distinct from Anselm's–, not because he rejects Anselm's definition (he uses it in "Meditation Five"), but because he must first answer Thomas's critique about the necessity of God's existence before offering Anselm's formulation to fully bridge the gap. God is defined as "a substance that is infinite, independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful, and which created [all things]."[48] He goes on to describe this being as absolutely perfect in every way. This idea of God is far greater and more perfect than any human being, so it is impossible for these ideas to formally originate in the human mind. Hence, the formal cause of this idea of God must be outside the self and in a being at least as preeminent as the idea.[49] Because the self is finite and imperfect, it cannot be the formal cause of the idea of an infinite and perfect deity. In fact, one's knowledge of one's own finitude and imperfection speaks to the priority of God's perfection and infinity, thus making it impossible for the human mind to be the formal cause of the idea.[50]

From here, Descartes quickly goes through other possible causes of the idea and shows their falsity. The idea of God cannot come through negation or a knowledge of a lack in the self—such as the idea of cold—for infinitude and perfection are by definition more real than the self.[51] While the idea of God cannot be fully grasped—because it is higher than the self—it can still be understood clearly and distinctly in so far as it can be known, which is enough to know that its formal cause must reside outside the self.[52] The self also cannot be the formal cause, because even if it were far greater than it knew itself to be, it possesses potency, change, and cannot cause itself, while God is pure actuality, does not change, and is the cause of all being.[53] There must be an ultimate cause outside the self that is self-existent, and thus God. Lastly, this idea cannot be formally caused by the mind bringing together a composite of many things outside the self to form an idea of a perfect being, for part of the perfection of God is his unity and simplicity—something that nothing else possesses.[54] Hence, God isn't known adventitiously, through the senses, or through abstraction from knowledge of the self.

If this be the case, then the idea of God could not originate from the mind's invention nor from an adventitious cause. Hence, it must be an innate idea just like the knowledge of the self, known clearly and distinctly by the natural light.[55] Therefore, he concludes: "I recognize that it would be impossible for me to exist with the kind of nature I have—that is, having within me

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he maintains that these are "merely modes of a substance" and since mind is a substance, these ideas could be "contained in me eminently." This seems suspect and it rather argues for the fact that either he must also be a corporeal being or that these ideas exist formally outside his mind. Nevertheless, this is not essential for his argument for the existence of God, even though it calls into question his other main claim about the primacy of the mind.

48. Descartes, *Meditations*, 31. In this definition he differs from Anselm in that he doesn't posit existence as one with God's essence, at least at this point in the proof; nevertheless, by arguing God's perfection he assumes existence as an aspect of perfection. While parts of his proof are similar to Anselm's—particularly the notion that, since God can be thought, he must exist—his proof in "Meditation Three" is also different because God's existence isn't part of the definition of the idea of God. Yet, in "Meditation Five" he does produce an ontological argument for God which is very similar to Anselm's, but this is only after he establishes that everything "clearly and distinctly" known must be true, a claim he proves in "Meditation Four." Perhaps his reason for withholding existence as part of the initial definition is so that he can focus on the argument for causation without distracting the reader by the argument from definition. In this way, he clearly answers Aquinas' challenge of the ontological argument before he puts it forward in "Meditation Five."

49. Descartes, *Meditations*, 31.

50. Descartes, *Meditations*, 31.

51. Descartes, *Meditations*, 30-31. One of the famous objections is that the idea of infinity is actually a negation—the negation of a boundary—which means that we understand the idea by means of our experience of finitude. But Descartes replies that finitude is actually a negation of the infinite, for all limitation is understood as negation. Thus, infinitude and perfection are prior to finitude and imperfection. Ibid., "Fifth Replies", 81.

52. Descartes, *Meditations*, 32.

53. Descartes, *Meditations*, 32-34.

54. Descartes, *Meditations*, 34.

55. Descartes, *Meditations*, 35.

the idea of God—were it not the case that God really existed—a God, I say, the idea of whom is in me, who possesses all those high perfections which, however they may transcend my powers of comprehension, I am yet in some fashion able to reach in thought."[56]

Through this proof, Descartes answers Thomas's main critique of Anselm, showing how the idea of God is innate, is clear and distinct, and necessitates the real formal existence of God outside the mind, and he makes use of scholastic logic and the structure of Thomas's own arguments for God's existence.

Having established this, Descartes offers Anselm's ontological argument in "Meditation Five," arguing that God's essence necessitates his existence actually, for "a being completely perfect" cannot lack any perfection, and not existing is certainly lacking a perfection.[57] Whereas in other things one can conceive of essence without believing it exists actually, existence is as inseparable from God as a valley is inseparable from a mountain or as the equality of a triangle's three angles being equal to two right angles is from the nature of a triangle as a three-sided polygon.[58]

One might object that even though I cannot conceive of a mountain without a valley, this doesn't entail that a mountain or valley actually exists; in the same way, merely thinking that God exists doesn't entail his actual existence. But Descartes responds by showing that for God, existence is to essence as valley is to mountain, such that one cannot think of God as not existing, just as one cannot think of a mountain without a valley: "In the case of God…I cannot think Him save as existing; and it therefore follows that existence is inseparable from Him, and that He therefore really exists. It is not that this necessity is brought about by my thought…on the contrary, the necessity which lies in the thing itself, that is the necessity of God's existence, determines me to think in this way."[59] It is impossible for the mind to conceive of God save as existing. In this, his argument is identical to Anselm's.

Thomas argues, however, that many people do not think of God at all; and when they do, they do not necessarily define or think of him in this way. Many people have very fuzzy notions of God that are not at all the clear and distinct notion that Descartes claims God to be.[60] Descartes answers this objection, as he often does, by appealing to geometry. Whereas one might not fully understand the nature of circles and quadrilateral figures, which leads one to be mistaken in one's premises or definitions and, say, suppose that all quadrilateral shapes can be inscribed in circles—thus necessitating that a rhombus can be inscribed in a circle (which is demonstrably false)—so too one might be mistaken in one's notion of God, leading to irrational conclusions like positing that God's nature doesn't necessitate existence. But just as in geometry, the proper conclusions become clear and distinct and unassailable once one fully understands the premises and proper definitions (definitions which are already innately in the mind but not immediately known), so too, when one understands that a first and sovereign being necessitates all perfections and that existence most certainly is a perfection, the existence of God as inseparable from his essence becomes clear and distinct and unassailable in one's mind. One may not immediately understand all the necessary conclusions one can draw from the nature of a triangle as a rectilinear figure having only three sides, but once one follows the logic, one must conclude that the sum of its three angles is always equal to two right angles. This is also the case with God's existence being a necessary consequence of God's perfection, which is his nature.[61] And where could this notion of God derive? It must have come from a formal reality outside the self that is at least as great as the idea. Thus, God being "that than which no greater thing can be thought" necessitates that he exists actually.

In this way, he brings together Thomas's arguments from causation with Anselm's ontological argument to

56. Descartes, *Meditations*, 35.

57. Rene Descares, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, in *The European Philosophers from Descartes to Nietzsche* (New York: Random House, 1992), 62.

58. Descartes, *Meditations*, 62.

59. Descartes, *Meditations*, 63.

60. Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1, q. 2, a. 1, ad 1.

61. Descartes, *Meditations*, 63-64.

show that the conclusion "God exists" is demonstrably true.

CONCLUSION

Are Descartes' arguments sufficient to answer Thomas's critique and rescue Anselm's ontological argument? Like all arguments in philosophy, that is still up for debate. Because Descartes never explicitly mentions Thomas or Anselm, it's impossible to know for sure if he consciously set out to defend Anselm in the face of Thomas. Nevertheless, he either wittingly or unwittingly did so, and anyone who seeks to dispute the merits of the ontological argument must do so in the face of Descartes' defense. For if there is one thing that philosophy calls us to, it is to never rest fighting the first or weakest form of an idea, but to seek out its strongest champion and take up the challenge. And, in the spirit of Anselm, one can affirm that whether one wins or loses, the attempt to grapple with the nature of God and understand who he is and how we come to know him leaves us better able to hold fast to God through faith and affirm his greatness, power, and perfection.

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STUDIES IN PROTESTANT IRENICS

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Exposure

BEN EGERTON

Regrets; yes, many. None
as deep as that time after I didn't stop
for a photo of four life-sized resin dinosaurs
in the trailer of a truck
parked on the Hutt Road. Sure
I have excuses: the dog was desperate
for a walk—she'd been shut in all day;
there was nowhere safe to pull over;
I could catch them on my way home.
It was hard to identify the species,
what with only their top halves showing,
and me lacking a background
in palaeontology. The dinosaurs stood
two abreast and two deep, as they would have
on the ark had Noah been instructed
to include them, and a taut faun tarpaulin
extended from the cab end of the trailer
to the shoulders of the inner pair—
lending them a look in part startled
apology/part superhero/part Christo artwork.
Even though that dinosaur horse
has long bolted, I'm still shutting
the photography stable door
at every opportunity. Only this last week
I've framed an uncracked clutch
of de-nested blackbirds' eggs,
windswept leaves gathered to the shape
of Australia, an oil stain so vivid
as to make a fake of the Turin Shroud.
But I'm yet to take anything to correct
my transgression of not having snapped
those semi-exposed reproductions,
those plastic sentinels of the Campanian.
For after walking the dog, I turned for home.
But no, they were not.

Reconstructing Moral Formation: The Traits and Habits that Allow Jane Austen's Heroines to Build Virtue

ROBIN JEAN HARRIS

Jane Austen only *seems* to have written romances. In truth, she was deeply preoccupied with how people become virtuous (or not). Alasdair MacIntyre identified Austen's understanding of virtue as belonging to the Christian and Aristotelian tradition of virtue ethics. In *After Virtue,* he says, "It is her uniting of Christian and Aristotelian themes in a determinate social context that makes Jane Austen the last great effective imaginative voice in the tradition of thought about, and practice of, the virtues which I have tried to identify." [1]

While her novels all end in marriages, those marriages are both the culmination and beginning of a certain kind of communal virtue formation. Marriage as such is not the *telos* for Austen's characters, but rather a particular school of virtue. The obstacles to her heroines' marriages—the cruel parents, delayed inheritance, vocational crises, etc.—are precisely what expose her heroines' need for virtues they don't yet possess.

Ideally, virtue formation begins in childhood with a good education, virtuous adults to imitate, encouragement to read, and practices of regular prayer. Since virtue is built through the practice and the cultivation of habits, children who become virtuous must be surrounded by adults who share a vision for their own *telos*: to be happy in the Aristotelian sense; to be virtuous and therefore fulfilled. As Christians we can add, to be a saint.

Austen has much to say about how parents shape a person in either virtue or vice. Parents who leave their children to their own devices live to regret it (think of Mr. Bennett). In fact, most Austen parents fail to form their children in all the ways needed to live a virtuous life. And yet, Austen's heroines all overcome the deficiencies of their upbringing to become virtuous women. Taking all her novels together, we can see that Austen saw several personal traits and habits as being necessary to "rescue" a person from the consequences of an insufficient or absent childhood moral education:

1. Alasdair MacIntyre. *After Virtue,* 3rd edition. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, 240.

1) attunement to nature; 2) habits of reading and contemplation; 3) self-reflection.

ATTUNEMENT TO NATURE

For Austen, becoming virtuous means being aligned with and attuned to reality, and that necessitates observing and enjoying nature. Her virtuous characters are sensitive to nature to varying degrees. They do not always share Marianne's romantic passion for "dead leaves,"[2] but a character's ability to appreciate and *see* nature often signals her relationship with reality.

In *Mansfield Park*, when the young people take a trip to Southerton, Fanny Price and Miss Crawford share a carriage ride, but their internal experience could not be more different. For Fanny,

> Her own thoughts and reflections were habitually her best companions; and in observing the appearance of the country, the bearings of the roads, the difference of soil, the state of the harvest, the cottages, the cattle, the children, she found entertainment that could only have been heightened by having Edmund to speak to of what she felt.[3]

In contrast, Mary Crawford "had none of Fanny's delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling; she saw nature, inanimate nature, with little observation; her attention was all for men and women, her talents for the light and lively."[4] The narrator weighs Mary's mind and finds it wanting. The brilliant line "nature, inanimate nature" is a sly perspective shift into Mary's "voice" whereby the narrator shows us what Mary sees around her—*ostensibly* the same trees and soil and children that Fanny sees—but for Mary they are "inanimate." Because they will not serve for a flirtation, they hold no interest for her mind. Mary's mind is numb and closed off to the life and beauty around her.

In contrast, the world is alive for Fanny. Later in the novel, as she stands with Edmund looking out into the night sky filled with stars, she says,

> When I look out on such a night as this, I feel as if there could be neither wickedness nor sorrow in the world; and there certainly would be less of both if the sublimity of Nature were more attended to, and people were carried more out of themselves by contemplating such a scene.[5]

For Fanny, nature is what carries a person out of herself to the transcendent. A soul that is "awake" to the beautiful and transcendent in nature will likewise be awake to the morally transcendent. Mary Crawford is morally numb in part because she is closed off to reality in nature. Fanny must grow in the virtue of courage, but she is able to grow at all because her soul is alive.

READING AND CONTEMPLATION

Austen was both a reader and a thinker, and her characters' relationships to books tell us much about their character.

In a conversation with the heartbroken Captain Benwick at Lyme, Anne recommends "collections of the finest letters, such memoirs of characters of worth and suffering, as occurred to her at the moment as calculated to rouse and fortify the mind by the highest precepts, and the strongest examples of moral and religious endurances."[6] Anne shares books and letters that she had read herself. Reading and reflecting on them had given Anne the fortitude she needed to weather nine years of regret. Although Anne's family had not supplied her with either moral instruction or models of virtue in her childhood, her habits of reading and contemplating help her grow into a virtuous woman who can weather sorrow and trouble.

Catherine Moreland was not a good student as a child,[7] and describes her mother's education as indifferent and even tortuous,[8] but her obsession with Gothic novels acts as an education in itself. While she mistakes *how* books are applicable to reality, her instinct to read and compare life to what she has read is a good one. While Catherine's growth will necessitate broadening and improving the quality of her reading, her practice of

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2. Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, in *The Complete Novels*. Introduction by Karen Joy Fowler. Penguin Classics, 2006, chapter 16.

3. Austen, *Mansfield Park*, chapter 8.

4. Austen, *Mansfield Park*, chapter 8.

5. Austen, *Mansfield Park*, chapter 11.

6. Austen, *Persuasion*, chapter 11.

7. Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, chapter 1.

8. Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, chapter 14.

seeing the world in light of her reading is a form of contemplation.

Peter Leithart says, "In the end, Gothic fiction is not so misleading as we might be led to believe. The "ideas" that it "admits" are valuable for shaping imagination, moral insight, and conduct."[9] Because of Catherine's immaturity, she misinterprets the *scale* of the villainy she comes across, but she is correct in discerning a likeness between General Tilney and the villains from her novels.[10] It is precisely this habit of reading and contemplation that gives her insight into the character of those around her.

SELF-REFLECTION

While religion is rarely foregrounded in Austen's novels, C.S. Lewis and Sara Emsley have both pointed to the religious overtones in the "undeceptions"[11] that her protagonists experience. In *A Note on Jane Austen,* C.S. Lewis observes the religious language used to describe Marianne's attitude toward her past foolish behavior:

> …the very vocabulary of the passage strikes a note unfamiliar in Jane Austen's style. It makes explicit, for once, the religious background of the author's ethical position. Hence such theological or nearly-theological words as *penitence*, even the *torture of penitence, amendment, self-destruction, my God*.[12]

Marianne has this moral awakening after a long illness and recovery that forced her to reflect on her life.[13] Emsley observes the similarity between her characters' self-reflection and a line from one of Austen's prayers:

> Teach us to understand the sinfulness of our own hearts, and bring to our knowledge every fault of temper and every evil habit in which we have indulged to the discomfort of our fellow-creatures, and the danger of our own souls.[14]

This conviction of one's own moral failings appears most strongly in the arcs of Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse, and Marianne Dashwood.[15] After Elizabeth reads Mr. Darcy's letter, she realizes that she had been seeing what she wanted to see in Wickham.

> She grew absolutely ashamed of herself. . . 'How despicably have I acted!' she cried. - 'I, who have prided myself on my discernment!... I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away... Till this moment I never knew myself.'[16]

Elizabeth recognizes that what she *had* called discernment was actually willful blindness and prejudice. Her willingness to honestly self-reflect and her resolve to change allow her to grow in virtue.

In *Emma,* after Mr. Knightley confronts Emma for insulting Miss Bates, Emma had never "felt so agitated, mortified, grieved, at any circumstance in her life. . . She felt it at her heart. How could she have been so brutal, so cruel to Miss Bates!"[17] Emma's heart is revealed to herself and she resolves to never again neglect Miss Bates or any others. Emma suffers similarly when it becomes clear that what she thought was a friendship with Harriet Smith was something else entirely:

> Her own conduct, as well as her own heart, was before her in the same few minutes ... How improperly had she been acting by Harriet! How inconsiderate, how indelicate, how irrational, how unfeeling had been her conduct! What blindness, what madness, had led her on! It struck her with dreadful force, and she was ready to give it every bad name in the world.[18]

Emma cannot build the virtues of amiability or charity until she realizes that, far from being a true friend to Harriet, she is simply meddling with and manipulating her. Emma's painful self-reflection will lead to virtue as she learns to discern her own motivations.

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9. Peter Leithart, *Miniatures and Morals: The Christian Novels of Jane Austen.* Canon Press, 2004, 83.

10. Austen, *Northanger Abbey,* chapter 14.

11. C.S. Lewis's term from "A Note on Jane Austen", in *Selected Literary Essays, ed. Walter Hooper. Cambridge University Press, 2013.*

12. Lewis, "A Note on Jane Austen", *Selected Literary Essays*, 177.

13. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility,* chapter 46.

14. Emsley, Sarah. *Jane Austen's Philosophy of the Virtues.* Palgrave Macmillian, 2005, 8.

15. CS Lewis also includes Catherine Morland in this list, but for the sake of space, and because her "conversion" is more intellectual than moral, I am limiting this discussion to the other three.

16. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, chapter 36.

17. Austen, *Emma*, chapter 43.

18. Austen, *Emma*, chapter 47.

In *Sense and Sensibility,* Marianne's illness "gave [her] leisure and calmness for serious recollection." As she reflects on her past behavior, she tells Elinor that she sees "nothing but a series of imprudence towards myself, and want of kindness to others. . . ."[19] She desires to atone to God for her unkind and imprudent actions and to become more like her virtuous sister. Her illness was a forced period of self-reflection, one which forced her to see her own heart and confront her habits of selfish emotional indulgence. With her new awareness that her excessive sensibility is actually unvirtuous, Marianne can begin to balance emotion with reason, and to cultivate prudence.

Emsley connects these heroines' self-reflection to another of Austen's prayers:

> Reflecting on the past, these heroines examine their judgment of, and behavior toward, the people around them: in the language of the first prayer, they fulfill the injunction to "consider how the past day has been spent by us, what have been our prevailing thoughts, words and actions during it, and how far we can acquit ourselves of evil."[20]

As Thomas Rodham remarks, "this is virtue ethics at a different level—it's about moral vision, not just moral content."[21] Austen does not simply show us what a moral education looks like; she invites us into her own school of morals. Reading her novels is an exercise in contemplation on the Good. We read so that we too may become undeceived.

CONCLUSION

While attunement to nature, reading and contemplation, and self-reflection are all necessary means by which one can gain a moral education, they are not sufficient. The question remains: how does one convert from an unvirtuous person to a virtuous person? How does a Mary Crawford become a Fanny Price?

We should not miss that the only characters who ever undergo such "undeceptions" are those whose will was *already* oriented to the good. Austen's heroines are devout Christian women whose whole self-understanding orbits around conforming to the Good. But Mary Crawford doesn't possess the smallest drop of piety. Although she has some of the traits I have outlined here—she is well-read, and knows her own mind, for example—she does not want to be virtuous, and therefore she cannot be virtuous. Her "contemplations" are all of men and women and the selfish machinations of worldly society. Her will is set on the temporal and carnal, and refuses to engage with the transcendent. When confronted with the horrific reality of her brother's adultery, Mary can only see the inconvenience and imprudence of the affair; she is totally insensible to the moral offense.[22] Mary's will is bent away from the good, so that even her habits of reading and self-reflection cannot save her from her moral miseducation.

Ultimately, what draws each of Austen's heroines—and what drew Austen herself—on their moral pilgrimage—was a will oriented toward the good. Henry Austen said of his sister that she:

> . . . was thoroughly religious and devout; fearful of giving offence to God, and incapable of feeling it towards any fellow creature. On serious subjects she was well-instructed, both by reading and meditation, and her opinions accorded strictly with those of our Established Church.[23]

While no eulogy can be said to be an exact portrait of the deceased, it's significant that Henry mentions "reading and meditation" as particular characteristics of Austen's moral life. Austen was not theorizing about the path to virtue in her novels: her heroines revealed her own practices as she grew in virtue.

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19. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility,* chapter 46.

20. Emsley, *Philosophy of the Virtues*, 9.

21. Rodham, Thomas. "Reading Jane Austen as a Moral Philosopher", Philosophy Now, 2013.

22. Austen, *Mansfield Park, chapter 47.*

23. Emsley, *Philosophy of the Virtues*, 6-7.

Weep, Shudder, Die: On Opera and Poetry[1]

BY DANA GIOIA
REVIEWED BY ZSANNA MÁRIA BODOR

The first time I ever saw an opera, I wept. The opera was Puccini's *La bohème.* Sprawled on my parents' futon bed in upstate New York, I was transfixed, glued to our staticky television set as the lead soprano sang her signature aria. Spelled across the screen were the English translations to Illica's Italian libretto: *Mi chiamano Mimi, il perchè non so* [*They call me Mimi. Why? I do not know*]. Charmed by the simplicity of the text and the playful shrug of Mimi's lace-clad shoulders, my eyes read along eagerly, hungrily. I watched in disgust as the coquettish Musetta played mercilessly with Marcello's heart. I shuddered as Mimi grew progressively more ill, dying of consumption, with her lover Rodolfo unable to help her. My parents, who had never once permitted my brothers or me to be late to a meal, quietly slipped me a bowl of soup. They knew well the forces they were up against. And, as the curtains fell upon Mimi's deathbed, with tears streaming down my face, I knew I had fallen in love. I was six years old.

It would be ten years before I would see a live opera. Yet the spell cast over me during that initial television broadcast has never been broken, and the most vivid part of the memory—even more than the sweeping grandeur of the music or the brightly-colored costumes—remains, strangely enough, the subtitles. My first experience of opera was text-driven.

In his introduction to *Weep, Shudder, Die: On Opera and Poetry,* Gioia asserts that "the libretto is not a shabby coat rack on which the magnificent vestments of music are hung. Operas begin with the words" (xii). Throughout the book's wonderfully varied chapters, Gioia's overarching thesis remains clear: The canon of enduring, long-lasting operatic repertoire—those operas to which we return, time and time again—owe their success and longevity to the compelling nature of their libretti. In Gioia's own words, "Strong words inspire composers, weak words burden them" (xii). *Weep, Shudder, Die* is, above all, a tribute to the unsung heroes of opera: the librettists.

Gioia is uniquely suited to writing such a book. Despite having served as Poet Laureate of California, Chairman for the National Endowment for the Arts, and—at one time—even as corporate vice president for General Foods, Gioia is not merely an opera lover. He bears the distinction of having written libretti for five different operas: *Nosferatu* (2004), with music by Alva Henderson; *Tony Caruso's Final Broadcast* (2010) and *Haunted* (2009), with Paul Salerni; and *The Three Feathers* (2014) and *Maya and the Magic Ring* (2025) with Lori Laitman (221).

1. *Weep, Shudder, Die: On Opera and Poetry* by Dana Gioia. Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2024. Paperback. 220 pp. $19.95

In the first five chapters of the book, Gioia gives his readers statistical evidence for the importance of the opera librettist. Pointing out that some of the greatest composers in the world—Schubert, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms, and Mahler—failed to ever write a "successful opera," Gioia suggests that musical genius is not enough (9). The most popular operas in the world come not only from a small handful of composers, but also from a select group of librettists: "Half of the international standard repertory...are the work of only eight poets" (12). Thus, Gioia argues, powerful operatic music does not exist in a vacuum; it is inspired, called forth by powerful words.

Modern listeners often assume that the words are secondary to opera because performances are frequently sung in their original, foreign language. However, as Gioia points out in his historical overview of the genre, the earliest operas were sung for local audiences, "in the vernacular," as it were. Renaissance opera, which found its origins in sixteenth-century Italy, was meant to "recreate" the experience of attending a classical Greek drama. Early opera sounded more like "intoned declamation" than singing (4); it was only in subsequent centuries that opera came to be characterized by vocal virtuosity and florid musical excess. By a fascinating turn of events, today's operagoers increasingly place renewed emphasis on the meaning of the text. With the advent of "surtitles" in 1983, providing a "simultaneous translation" for attendees has become the new standard, often in multiple languages (8). In a Verdi opera I saw in Budapest last summer, personalized screens furnished surtitles in English, German, Hungarian, and the original Italian. Gioia's book has come at an important time: "Technology [has] made twenty-first century opera almost as literary as its Renaissance prototype" (8).

After giving an historical overview of opera's origins and sharing statistical evidence for the impact that a good libretto can have on an opera's success, Gioia also proceeds to narrate an account of his own first encounters with opera. Readers can delight in the story of a working-class Los Angeles boy who fell in love with the "bewildering pleasure" of the opera records he listened to in his parents' apartment after school. Further proving his point that *text* is central to an experience of opera, young Gioia seems to have had a particular fascination with American operas because—in an era before surtitles—he could understand the words and follow along with the drama.

One of the greatest strengths of Gioia's book is the important distinction he makes between poetic *verse* and poetic *drama.* A librettist may be an accomplished poet, but a successful opera requires a libretto with powerful simplicity, compelling characters, and a dramatic plot. In his chapter, "Auden Abandons Poetry," Gioia draws his readers' attention to operas that "read well on the page as verse drama" but fail to inspire a clear musical narrative (53). He traces Auden's evolution as a librettist, explaining that the poet's eventual operatic successes came after he realized that the "lyrics [are] secondary to characterization and plotting" (52). A good opera is propelled by strong text, but

> A libretto does not succeed on how well it reads on the printed page. The words can only be judged in their final context, set to music…. Poetic drama—comic or tragic—is not primarily poetic; it is theater that uses poetry to intensify the language that the drama requires (57).

Here, Gioia's excellent summary captures another recurring theme in his book: that successful opera is the result of dynamic collaboration. A librettist cannot write the verses with just his own ideal poetic ends in mind; likewise, a composer cannot draft the music in such a way that obscures or diminishes the power of the text. Citing some of the greatest operatic partnerships—Hugo von Hoffmansthal and Richard Strauss, Felice Romani and Vincenzo Bellini, Lorenzo da Ponte and W.A. Mozart—Gioia provides a compelling argument against the "Romantic notion of the artist as an individual creative force" (15). Literary critics of the twentieth century complained that, after "Goethe and Schiller," the Aristotelian, cathartic form of tragic theater had disappeared almost entirely (68). Gioia disagrees with this complaint altogether, arguing that tragedy did not disappear in the Romantic age—it simply switched genres:

> The great tragedies of the Romantic age did not appear on the theatrical stage but in the opera house. The masterpieces were not written by Shelley, Byron, Hugo, or Hölderlin; they were composed by Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi, and Wagner (69).

An implication of this argument, which Gioia hints at without stating explicitly, is that truly great opera is the result of collaboration rather than individual creative genius. One exception to this theory, as Gioia himself readily admits, would be composer Richard Wagner, who wrote all of his own libretti. Wagner's preeminent *Gesamtkunstwerk,* his *Ring* cycle, which consists of four consecutive operas and over fifteen hours of music, certainly does not seem to have been written with a collaborative deadline in mind.

In any case, Gioia's discussion of artistic partnership—and the humility, collaboration, and tension often needed to create an operatic masterpiece—is not merely an interesting highlight of his book, but something also confirmed by his own experiences writing opera libretti. Gioia writes, "Working with other artists is not easy. The pleasure is mixed with anxiety, frustration, and disagreement; but shared labor nurtures deep friendship" (198). In the contemporary world of opera, a librettist is often viewed as a workhorse who exists only to "do the impresario and composer's bidding" (201). Gioia, by contrast, has more than once made the extraordinary request that he be permitted to choose the subject matter for his opera libretti. With a foot in both the literary and the musical world, Gioia appears to be an ideal librettist for modern opera. Because of his deep belief in the importance of the text, he chooses his own subject so that the story contains a "genuine poetic spark" (201); simultaneously, he defers to musical forms and the composer's input while crafting individual scenes and arias.

One aspect of the book that is not quite as clearly woven into the overall thematic structure is Gioia's commentary on American opera. As much as these sections are informative and clearly well-researched, I found myself wondering why Gioia chooses to include such a lengthy overview of American opera's development in the latter half of his book. This topic, however, proves relevant in setting up some of the final, lingering questions at the book's conclusion. A book about an archaic musical form like opera must necessarily comment upon the future of the genre. American opera is remarkably difficult to categorize. Is Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* an opera? How about Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd,* or Bernstein's *Candide*? The fact that the lines between opera and musical theatre are so blurred in the American repertory, Gioia argues, is no accident. Successful opera relies on the momentum, the forward thrust, of a dramatic text—and popular musical theatre is rooted in such texts. Stephen Sondheim, we are told, received his training as a lyricist from none other than Oscar Hammerstein: "I was essentially trained by Oscar Hammerstein," Sondheim recalled, "to think of songs as one-act plays, to move a song from point A to point B dramatically" (165). American opera has been most successful when it borrows from and is enriched by popular musical traditions—Broadway musicals, African American music, jazz rhythms and harmonies (182). Gioia applauds such musical "fusion," as he calls it; while some may "denounce such borrowing as cultural appropriation; most see it as the creative conversation between cultures and classes" (182).

Such comments suggest that Gioia resists the "professional snobbery" that can often characterize classical musicians, composers, and operagoers. "It is naive to believe," writes Gioia, "[that] American opera will become more vital by clinging to elite inbreeding" (184). He offers a different approach, situating the future of opera—both in America and in our increasingly globalized world—in its willingness to expand, to become an "omnivorous" genre (182). Instead of remaining encased in a glass box, opera must shatter our expectations; it must explore the "extremes of human experience" and portray the "outmost limits of suffering" (68). Like the singers, we too must allow ourselves to weep, shudder, and die.

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A Hermeneutic of Imagination: Unlocking Scripture's Full Potential[1]

BY KNUT M. HEIM, WITH JEFFREY R. OETTER

REVIEWED BY LOUIS MARKOS

I have always been a fan of Leland Ryken, the foremost evangelical scholar of and advocate for reading the Bible as literature. For half a century, he has encouraged and equipped Christians with a high view of scriptural inerrancy to enhance their understanding and application of God's Word by taking careful account of the many genres, metaphors, and devices employed by the biblical authors. The parables of Jesus, for example, are fictional short stories meant to illustrate a point; the details should not be taken "literally." Prophecy written in poetry allows for multiple meanings and multiple fulfillments. When Jesus speaks hyperbolically, we should take it as such; otherwise, we might start cutting off our hands and plucking out our eyes!

Although the authors of *A Hermeneutic of Imagination: Unlocking Scripture's Full Potential* oddly, and somewhat troublingly, make no mention of Ryken, they do an excellent job training their readers to pay careful attention to the literary qualities of the Bible, including its heavy use of figurative language and its emotional and even humorous dimensions. Knut Heim, professor of Old Testament at Denver Seminary, and Jeffrey Oetter, whose PhD dissertation he supervised, are pioneers who draw together new findings from such diverse fields "as neuroscience, metaphor theory and cognition, translation theory, the affective sciences, humor studies, and the interdisciplinary study of imagination itself." In fact, they boldly proclaim that "*A Hermeneutic of Imagination* is the first book-length study that takes the Bible's imaginative nature seriously and integrates insights from these disciplines into the academic study of the Bible" (2).

Far from leading us into idolatry, they argue, imagination properly used "helps us to identify beings and events as true and real even when we cannot see with our own eyes." As such, it "prevents us from creating artifacts that would allow a sensory engagement with physical material designed to represent God" (5-6). Imagination empowers us to fill in the gaps, to con-

1. *A Hermeneutic of Imagination: Unlocking Scripture's Full Potential* by Knut M. Hein, with Jeffrey R. Oetter. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2025. Paperback, 224 pp. $28.99

struct a fuller picture of something that the Bible only hints at. A hermeneutic of imagination can thus help believers find the middle-ground between taking everything in the Bible literally and taking nothing in it literally.

Without denying the Reformation's focus on the clarity of scripture, Heim and Oetter expose the danger of interpretive strategies that resist ambiguity, preferring to edit out anything that appears abnormal or contradictory. Traditional hermeneutics, they argue,

> often fail to detect nuance or humor because of the impulse to explain away unexpected details to make the text fit with preconceived ideas, and so what is truly interesting, intriguing, and rewarding tends to be missed because it appears to be an obstacle for understanding. By contrast, reading with imagination intentionally focuses on problematic content as opportunities for deeper understanding and new insights—as opportunities for discovery, growth, and transformation (19).

Heim and Oetter claim more for their hermeneutic than mere correction. Imaginative reading is not "an optional extra; rather, it is essential for reading the biblical texts if we want to understand them as they were intended to be understood by their authors, human and divine" (24). Our response to passages that include unexpected omissions, vague language, conflicting advice, or morally questionable content inconsistent with God's holy nature should not be to evade but to engage, not to go around but to go through, not to impose a solution but to achieve a resolution.

As a case study, the authors take a close, imaginative look at God's command to Ezekiel not to mourn his wife's death (Ezekiel 24:15-24). Rather than skip over the passage or accept the seeming callousness of God as a mystery we fallen humans cannot grasp, Heim and Oetter pay careful attention to nuances in the passage. As it turns out, God does *not* tell Ezekiel he cannot mourn, but that he cannot do so publicly. He must groan in quiet, as God himself will groan in quiet over the pain he will feel when Jerusalem is destroyed. "When God took away the delight of Ezekiel, this represented the terrible truth that God allowed his own wife—the people of Israel—to be taken from him" (37). "The difficult nature of the text," the authors conclude, "demands that our imagination help us cope with its challenging content. We cannot understand or process texts like this without it" (38).

OUR RESPONSE TO PASSAGES THAT INCLUDE UNEXPECTED OMISSIONS, VAGUE LANGUAGE, CONFLICTING ADVICE, OR MORALLY QUESTIONABLE CONTENT INCONSISTENT WITH GOD'S HOLY NATURE SHOULD NOT BE TO EVADE BUT TO ENGAGE

Reading the Bible imaginatively allows us to pick up on clues we might otherwise miss, but it also enables us to experience the Bible in a more visceral way. The scriptures abound with figurative language, the kind of language that "provides us with the means to verbalize mentally how our bodies through our brains process what our senses perceive in the world around and within us" (50). When we read David's prayer of confession, our imaginative engagement with the figurative language of Psalm 51 allows us to share David's feelings of guilt and remorse.

Modern people tend to be as suspicious of emotions as they are of imagination, but emotions, the authors insist, "are essential for human cognition and successful human relationships" (65). To achieve a full and accurate understanding of the narrative portions of scripture, we must attune ourselves "to the understated ways in which biblical narrators relate emotions—those of God, those of other characters in the stories, and their own" (65). Often, the Bible withholds details of how characters feel about their situations, forcing us as readers to fill in the emotional gaps.

To illustrate, the authors unpack the tragic tale of Tamar, who is raped and abandoned by her half-brother Amnon, only to be avenged by her brother Absalom when her father David does nothing to punish his

son—and later, by Absalom's rebellion against David (2 Samuel 13-18). Although the Bible's "relative silence [less than two verses] about Tamar's mental state after she had been raped has led many to conclude that her emotions did not matter to God, to the biblical authors, or to any of the other characters in these chapters," Heim and Oetter argue that an imaginative attempt to get inside her mental state will reveal that "Tamar's pain led to a rebellion resulting in a civil war that almost tore the entire nation apart and nearly extinguished the two siblings' entire family" (66). It does so, in part, by encouraging us to extend our sympathy for Tamar to Bathsheba, who was compelled to David's bed as Tamar was to Amnon's.

As the authors' hermeneutic of imagination helps us sympathize with the pain of Tamar (and Bathsheba), it enables us to feel God's righteous anger over sin and injustice and to experience the awe and wonder—whether joyous or fearful—that the characters of the Bible feel in God's presence. "The wonder that Scripture evokes is transformative because it affects our whole being, our bodies, our emotions, our intellect, and our volition. In other words, it fires our imagination and builds our faith" (70). Transformation is the key word here, a holistic transformation that involves all of us: heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Readers of *A Hermeneutic of Imagination* are likely to be most challenged by the chapter on the humorous dimensions of scripture. Can there really be sarcasm in the holy Word of God? The answer, of course, is yes, for the Bible contains the fullness of humanity in all its nobility and depravity. The passage that anchors Heim and Oetter's chapter on humor is Micah 6:1-7, which divides into two unequal halves. In verses 1-5, God, through the prophet, condemns Israel for her apostasy and ingratitude. In verses 6-7, an unnamed Israelite responds:

> "With what shall I come before the Lord,
> and bow myself before God on high?
> Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
> with calves a year old?
> Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
> with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
> Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
> the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"
> (ESV)

Though a surface reading of the passage suggests not only that the responder is truly repentant and godly, but that God would be pleased by his seemingly sincere offer of his firstborn son, an imaginative reading uncovers the blasphemous, mocking tone of the clearly unrepentant speaker.

CAN THERE REALLY BE SARCASM IN THE HOLY WORD OF GOD? THE ANSWER, OF COURSE, IS YES, FOR THE BIBLE CONTAINS THE FULLNESS OF HUMANITY IN ALL ITS NOBILITY AND DEPRAVITY.

The hyperbolic nature of the gifts offered reveal them to be insincere and laced with sarcasm, while the sudden shift from "thousands" and "ten thousands" to a single offering magnifies the incongruence. "[F]linging the offer to sacrifice his firstborn child in the prophet's face, he intends it as an acerbic insult to God, for it sarcastically combines what appears to be the ultimate sacrifice with a practice that is explicitly prohibited according to the biblical witness" (88-89). Were that not insulting enough, the authors demonstrate that the final verse should be translated "the fruit of my belly for the sin of my throat." "The 'fruit' of the belly," the authors explain, "refers not only to children but also to excrement, waste matter discharged from the bowels after the unclean food has been digested" (90).

Many of the imaginative analyses that Heim and Oetter present rely on their knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, a fact that strengthens their argument that translators of the Bible are wrong to think that their job is to provide smooth translations that remove all difficulties for modern readers. The authors attribute this in part to "a popular misunderstanding of the Reformation doctrine of the clarity or perspicuity of Scripture" (115). The Bible was not meant to be easy reading; it calls for intense study and engagement. Dynamic equivalent translations offer understandability

"at the expense of the Bible's literary profile and quality. The drive for communicative efficiency obscures most of the Bible's imaginative quirks and features—elements that the original authors and editors used to invite imaginative engagement" (119).

Heim and Oetter are fine apologists for their hermeneutic of imagination. In their concluding two chapters, they even extend its benefits to include two different areas of the Christian life. First, they offer it as a method and paradigm that can bridge the divide between those who treat the Bible theologically and those who treat it as an "academic artifact" (128). Second, they champion it as a practice and a discipline that can challenge readers today to expand their vision of God's will for the earth to take in center and margin alike, that which is safe and familiar as well as that which is foreign and peripheral.

I recommend *A Hermeneutic of Imagination* for its boldness, its clarity, and its holistic vision, but I did come away from it with some reservations. By the end of the book, the authors stretch their hermeneutic so far that it comes to signify little more than reading carefully and using a Bible encyclopedia. I was often reminded of Percy Shelley's "A Defense of Poetry," a great essay to be sure, but one in which the Romantic poet claims a domain for poetry that takes in everything, including his final claim that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world!

More seriously, the authors are not always consistent in their hermeneutic. In their opening chapter, they write that "when we now encounter a statement like Psalm 82:6 ('I say, "You are gods, children of the Most High, all of you"'), we do not take this statement literally and conclude that God is speaking to rival gods. Rather, we interpret the passage appropriately. The refusal to use our imagination would have led to a misinterpretation" (17-18).

I find this ironic, since the authors seem unaware that Michael Heiser, an imaginative interpreter if there ever was one, demonstrated, in his *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, that Jewish readers would have precisely read this verse to refer to other created beings that share God's spiritual nature but are not eternal. I fear that in this case, Heim and Oetter allow a modern, anti-supernatural bias to "blind" them to the possibility that Psalm 82 means what it says.

On the flipside, I felt that in their final chapter they did not include enough nuance when they concluded that "social justice plays a central role in the Old Testament. A hermeneutic of imagination resists the temptation to relativize this truth because the emphasis of the New Testament is elsewhere" (172). They do well to remind us of the strong Old Testament focus on justice for the widow, the orphan, and the stranger in the land, but the phrase "social justice" carries too much Marxist identity politics baggage to be used without qualification. They needed to work a bit harder to put themselves in the minds of the biblical writers and not allow modern notions of social justice to skew exegesis into eisegesis.

Still, these are minor criticisms. *A Hermeneutic of Imagination* has the potential to strengthen churches and seminaries, providing both with the necessary tools and paradigm to pursue "an exciting adventure of the mind that is at once theologically rewarding, intellectually compelling, and transformative" (177).

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The Market as God[1]

BY HARVEY COX

REVIEWED BY M. W. SINNETT

The Market as God is not the masterpiece that *The Secular City* is, but (as Jacob Bernoulli said of Isaac Newton) one "can recognize the lion by his kingly paw." Who else in our time but Professor Harvey Cox could lead us so deftly into the buzzing, blooming chaos of our society's response to the "dismal science." He presents us no abstract propositions, no deductive/coercive proofs of any assertions; he neither pretends to nor relies upon any expertise in economics or in the history thereof; instead, he draws our attention to features of our own society we had perhaps never explicitly recognized but which we now acknowledge we have always somehow known. Through an amazing selection of events, concrete examples, anecdotes, and passages from various texts, he builds up a picture in our minds of a world that we recognize as our own. In the great tradition of the Weberian *Geisteswissenschaften* his discussion fully exemplifies the principle of "adequacy": Its empirical justification lies in its intelligibility to the people who make up the society being interpreted. By means of an analysis of the "degradation of symbols" so prevalent in our society, he very ably documents the lamentable tendency of many people to assign "ultimate significance" (Tillich) to that which properly can have no more than "preliminary significance." Cox, in particular, provides an insightful account of the common tendency to "go after [the] strange god" known as The Market.

By way of summary (see Ch.1, esp. pp. 6-19; and Ch. 11): The Market is invisible and yet Its order and effects pervade the whole of life and society. It is all-powerful, providing for the survival of more than eight billion people on the earth as well as offering hope, for the first time in history, that poverty can become the exception rather than the rule of human existence. The Market's Wisdom is unsearchable, Its simplest precepts ("Public Benefits from Private Vices") calling into question long-standing habits of mind and even the reliability of our seemingly most elementary observations. The Market, indeed, is transcendent, the complexity of Its configurations beyond our conception, the mystery of Its process beyond all hope of adequate, non-symbolic expression. There are those, nevertheless, who claim to know It, to understand somewhat of Its ways, to have some sense where It is moving. And they call upon us to follow hard after It, to trust ourselves to That Which we cannot understand, to walk with faith where we cannot see. They enjoin us to lives of humility, to the loyal performance of the tasks It has allotted us, in the bold confidence we will be "led by an invisible hand to promote an interest that is no part of [our] intention." So it is written by the Prophet Adam Smith—Praise Be His Name!—in his Holy *Inquiry*.

It only remains to indicate the rather strange way in which this idolatrous nonsense is a natural expression of an order in society that is actually quite real.

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1. *The Market as God* by Harvey Cox. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016. Paperback. 320 pp. $21.00

The whole of *An Inquiry into The Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) of Adam Smith (1723-90), all nine-hundred and fifty pages of it (in the Glasgow Edition of 1976), consists of the exposition of the topic of its very first chapter, "Of the Division of Labour." There, among other things, we read:

> Observe the accommodation of the most common artificer or day-labourer in a civilized and thriving country, and you will perceive that the number of people of whose industry a part, though but a small part, has been employed in procuring him this accommodation exceeds all computation. The woollen coat, for example, which covers the day-labourer, as coarse and rough as it may appear, is the produce of the joint labour of a great multitude of workmen.

Here, in one of the most fatefully neglected passages in all of modern letters, Smith proclaims his adherence to an intellectual revolution, for he is asserting the reality and importance of what is now referred to as *emergent* (or *spontaneous*, or *polycentric*) *order*. This is not to say that this passage is not often remarked upon, but that its vast implications are rarely grasped. Smith invites us to "observe" the "accommodation" of the worker and then predicts, what he knows from long and bitter experience almost never happens, that the observer will also "perceive" the "joint labour of a great multitude of workmen." *Observe* the accommodation we certainly can, but not the multitude of contributors whose number "exceeds all computation," nor, even less, the social order through which their contributions come to be "joint." These latter, if they are to be known to us at all, will have to be *perceived*, and it is Smith's whole purpose to train the eyes of his readers' minds to promote the possibility of such perception. His account of the woolen coat therefore continues as follows:

> The shepherd, the sorter of the wool, the wool-comber or carder, the dyer, the scribbler, the spinner, the weaver, the fuller, the dresser, with many others, must all join their different arts in order to complete even this homely production. How many merchants and carriers, besides, must have been employed in transporting the materials from some of those workmen to others who often live in a very distant part of the country! How much commerce and navigation in particular, how many shipbuilders, sailors, sail-makers, rope-makers, must have been employed in order to bring together the different drugs made use of by the dyer, which often come from the remotest corners of the world! What a variety of labour too is necessary in order to produce the tools of the meanest of those workers!

Perhaps this is enough of Smith's account of the "accommodation"—There is a great deal more of it!—to suggest something of the mystery to which he is attempting to draw our intention. He refers us beyond the simple woolen coat, which we could always observe, to the inexhaustible abundance, which he hopes we can begin to perceive, of knowledge divided between thousands of workers and managers unknown to us, largely unknown even among themselves, yet somehow joined together to produce not only the simple woolen coat but everything necessary for human survival and well-being in a "civilized and thriving country."

The "nexus" (A. N. Whitehead) of relations from which the "accommodation" has emerged is itself emergent. In the famous phrase of Adam Ferguson (1723-1816), in his *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), this order is one of those "establishments" upon which nations "stumble," "which are indeed the result of human action, but not the execution of any human design." Smith concurs in describing the on-going specialization of labor:

> This division of labour, from which so many advantages are derived, is not originally the effect of any human wisdom, which foresees and intends that general opulence to which it gives occasion. It is the necessary, though very slow and gradual consequence of a certain propensity in human nature which has in view no such extensive utility; the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another.

Each step in the centuries-long process of division is intelligible as the action of a person who notices a

concrete opportunity for improved efficiency in some branch of manufacture without the least necessity to perceive much at all of the whole order or of any of the ultimate products to which he thus becomes an unwitting contributor. And the mystery only deepens in the realization that the emergence of marker order from as early as the Upper Paleolithicum into quite recent times has proceeded without anyone directing it or even being reflectively aware of it.

But what happens when there come to be those who *are*, to some degree, reflectively aware of it? What happens when there are those who not only observe market results but also begin to perceive the order of market process which produces them? The progressive intensification of the division of labor, Smith claims, "is not *originally* the effect of any human wisdom," but the significance cannot be overstated of the event through which, *subsequently*, market process comes to conscious awareness of itself in the minds of a multitude of its participants. It is in this respect that the "prophetic" authority of Adam Smith may be said to lie. As J. A. Schumpeter notes, in his magisterial *History of Economic Analysis* (1954), the *Inquiry* displays very little of economic principle that was original to Smith, and even less, we may add, that survived the "marginal revolution" of the early 1870's. Of theoretical/analytical ambitions, however, Smith partook very little;

> in fact [like most of his Scottish colleagues], he disliked whatever went beyond plain common sense. He never moved above the heads of even the dullest readers. He led them on gently, encouraging them by trivialities and homely observations, making them feel comfortable all along. While the professional of his time found enough to command his intellectual respect, the 'educated reader' was able to assure himself that, yes, this was so, he too had always thought so….

Of the maxims and habits of mind handed down through generations of workers and managers alike, some were discarded, others strengthened, sharpened and connected; expectations of the always-unknowable future became somewhat more rational; new forms of commercial organization and exchange proliferated; levels of prosperity were attained, along with a range of social mobility, undreamt of in all previous history. Ultimately, according to Schumpeter, "from about 1790 on, Smith became the teacher not of the beginner or the public but of the professionals, especially the professors," but the *Inquiry* remains principally an event in the history of the market itself, one of the privileged events in which the *logos* of its process is revealed and realized in the human thoughts and actions that constitute its fabric, and by which, accordingly, both market configuration and process are raised to qualitatively higher levels of sophistication.

Perhaps it is now easier, if not to condone, then at least to understand how predicates of Divinity might so easily be misapplied to the deep mysteries of market process. As the great mathematician Laplace said to Napoleon, however, we certainly have "no need of that hypothesis." For Adam Smith's painstaking account of "the natural order of liberty" is no more mystical or mystifying than that of Harvey Cox himself. Just as Professor Cox's discussion is an event in the same society he is discussing, lending it, we confidently hope, greater coherence through dispelling somewhat of his readers' confusion, Smith satisfied the same standard of "adequacy," promoting among many thousands of his readers a differentiated awareness of the order in which they already lived. He therefore transformed the order, multiplying its force and extent many-fold. Adam Smith, indeed, transformed the modern world, unleashing a power in society both wonderful and terrifying, a power of which we have, as yet, very little understanding. *The Market as God* helps us on our way, but there is still much to do, and the day is already far advanced.

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Geriatric Pregnancy

BETSY HOWARD

Trellised end of
the pumpkin vine,
just curled beneath
the mottled green,
one pistilled, shy
flower opens
golden to our
October sky,
cucurbit bulge beneath.
Gift forgetful of the frost.

Sacred Prayers Drawn from the Psalms of David

PETER MARTYR VERMIGLI

Philosophy begins in wonder, and there is perhaps no higher mode of wonder than prayer. The scholastic and humanist Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499–1562) is rightly known as a master theologian, philosopher, and bible commentator of the early Protestant tradition. He is less known, to his contemporary readers, for his contemplative prose. Here we see the contemplative aspect of philosophy in a Protestant key (bridging the worlds of exegesis, theology, philosophy, and ordinary experience) in the prose of a soul saturated with God and his gospel.

FROM PSALM 1

Take away from us, O great and good God, wicked plans and their attendant sins. Do not let us fall into an evil and shameful life. Likewise keep our souls far from contemning piety and scorning virtues. Instead of these plagues grant that we may constantly meditate on your law and your sacred writings. Then we will not, like the wicked, be carried about by every wind of impulse and doctrine as are light flakes of dust and worthless rubbish. Rather like trees planted by streams of water, endowed with faith and the life of the spirit, may we also bear the outward fruit of good works, and may whatever we do prosper and give praise and glory to your name and add to our salvation. Finally may we, in accord with your mercy, both stand up and be absolved before the court of your judgment after the wicked have already fallen. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

FROM THE SAME PSALM

Almighty God, we already understand quite clearly how serious troubles and woeful disasters so afflict the Church because we have often yielded to the counsels of the wicked when we should have turned away from the moment we recognized them. We have in no way turned aside from the path of sinners but have followed their path closely with our constant transgressions against your commandments. Moreover, for a long time we have contemned sound admonitions and healthy practices. We have neglected with considerable laziness and even insolence and have derided whatever your word offered to us. It is no wonder that now we have to undergo every heavy, irksome, and bitter experience instead of the happiness and tranquil peace that for so long we have, alas, misused. But now, O God, we flee to you as suppliants, confessing the evil deeds we have done, and we ask with urgent and ardent prayers

that you be kind and forgive us the sins that we have committed in our stupidity and wickedness. Make our souls as devoted as possible to your law so that we may ponder in our hearts day and night nothing except the words of your Holy Scriptures. That way we shall bring forth in due season sweet fruit, employing our faith in your word, and we will not be robbed of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, our efforts will always have a blessed outcome. But now we are hard pressed by our sins and are not unlike husks blown up and down by the winds of tribulation. At least, good Father, grant this: that our life may not be wasted in evil like the wicked. Rather, like the cause of the just, may you defend our life with the highest care and protection so that we may stand at the judgment and gathering of the just and that we may not fail in our cause. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FROM THE SAME PSALM

Since it has already been explained to us, O almighty God, that our happiness while we live here depends in large measure on how we beware of evil advice and profligate behavior and flee the company of those who spurn and deride everything and on how such plagues are replaced by wondrous zeal for the divine law on which we meditate and reflect night and day. Since we realize we have strayed far from this goal of our salvation, indeed have sinned grievously against this, we ask you that in your mercy you forgive our failures and deign to make us henceforward fruitful plants by the continual study and use of your word. May we not only bear fruit in your Church while we live, but may we also be able to pass successfully our judgment in the other world before you, who knows perfectly the way of the just. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

FROM PSALM 2

In this time, O great and good God, we feel that not only the Antichrist but all the power and force of the world has conspired against you and your Christ—namely those who think that the Gospel and the reformation of the Church are intolerable chains and a heavy yoke, so that they try by every device to break apart communities of believers and reject all discipline. But since you dwell in heaven and since the plotting of the devil and sinful flesh are not hidden from you, you laugh at their useless schemes, render vain their efforts, and make them instead the joke and laughingstock of your elect. Make them realize your anger, and may they at last be filled with terror by the fury of your wrath so that they cannot destroy your Church. You have put Jesus Christ, our only savior, over the Church so that he may reign in it mighty and invincible by his word and spirit. Graciously grant to us, your children, even though we are unworthy and disloyal, enough faith and constancy that we may have him as our only king and confess the same. May we have no doubts that we are his nation, people, and heritage. May we rightly understand that he is endowed with such strength and power that he punishes those he wishes with a power stronger than iron and brings them low like clay pots. O God, convert the kings of the earth to yourself so that they may understand and acknowledge and embrace and kiss your Son lest, his wrath being kindled, they perish on the spot. When it seems good to you, make blessed forever those who have really committed themselves to your faith. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

FROM THE SAME PSALM

Regardless of how much the devil rages, O great and good God, or the worldly powers rise up daily, or the flesh conspires with its slaves against the kingdom of your only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, still we know and hold firmly as part of our steadfast faith that you mock and scorn all such things—you who are mighty to crush them in your wrath and anger as soon as it pleases you. Since we are sometimes weak in our faith, so that driven by various fears we obey your commandments less than we ought, we beseech you that in your goodness you show us your favor so that we may be firmly convinced that your Son is our king and redeemer and holds complete power at your side over all things. When you begot him, you handed over all the nations for him to rule rightfully as his heritage. Grant us now finally to realize that and learn it so well that by serving you with all fear and honor we may not be smashed on the last day like a clay pot by the rod of your anger. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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