

THE NATURAL THEOLOGY OF THOMAS AQUINAS:
A SYNTHESIS OF ARISTOTLE AND AUGUSTINE

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Thesis: The natural theology of St. Thomas Aquinas resulted from an attempt to put the theological truths of Augustine into the philosophical terms of Aristotle which he accomplished without substantially corrupting the former or converting the later.

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THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Traditional Neo-Platonic Augustinianism

In order to gain a proper understanding of Thomistic Natural Theology one must view it in the context of the scholastic movement of his day. The term "scholastic" was first used as an appellation for teachers in the Medieval universities and the historic roots of embryonic scholasticism are traceable to the Augustinian and Neo-platonic strain of Christian philosophizing.¹ Thilly calls Augustine the last of the Christian classicists with whom ends the patristic period of formulating the Christian creeds. It was left then for Augustine's successors to take this fixed body of dogma and demonstrate its rationality. This they did in the typical Neo-platonic fashion until the 13th century. However from the death of Augustine in 430 A. D. until the 9th century this apologetic movement hardly produced an outstanding figure with the possible exception of Boethius. So permanent was this tradition that Leighton wrote, "It is no exaggeration to say that the spirit of Neo-platonism and medieval Christianity are identical....Augustine, whose thought dominated the whole of medieval Christianity was himself a Neo-platonic convert from Manicheism".² Probably, as A. C. Pegis remarks, "the safest general characteristic of the European philosophic tradition is that it consists in a series of footnotes on Plato".³

Add to this the fact that preceding the 12th century Christian

¹Thilly, History of Philosophy, p. 155.

²Leighton, The Field of Philosophy, p. 141.

³A. C. Pegis, St. Thomas and the Greeks, p. 73.

philosophers had in their possession only fragmentary translations of the Timaues and practically nothing of Aristotle,¹ and it is not difficult to see why Augustinianism prevailed until the 12th century or later. It wasn't until after the formation of the famous medieval University of Paris in 1200 A. D. that the works of Aristotle made their debut into Christian thinking. Even then, and only naturally so, they were viewed with much scepticism. So much so that as late as April 13, 1231, Pope Gregory IX renewed the indictment against teaching Aristotle until he was "thoroughly censored and purged".² However the intellectual curiosity aroused by a study of Aristotle was so great that by 1366 pontifical authority had made it necessary for students of arts to study the very treatises of Aristotle it had so long forbidden. But even after the initial debut of Aristotle in 1200, theologians were warned to teach theology "in its purity" and "without any admixture of worldly wisdom". Hence, "Even to the end of the 13th century and beyond there was a marked tendency to favor philosophical doctrines that could be reconciled with the Neo-platonic Augustinian tradition. It even eventually opposed Thomas Aquinas as late as 1270 A. D.".³

The Triumph of Aristotelian Thomism

With the new influx of Aristotelian philosophy came the inevitable task of its reconciliation with Christian dogma. This was not to be an easy task in light of the deeply rooted Neo-platonic tradition and even more formidable when we consider the unfavorable circumstances under which

¹"Only a few minor logical treatises were previously known" of Aristotle's works. A. A. Maurer, Medieval Philosophy, p. 85.

²Gilson, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, p. 240.

³Ibid. p. 240.

Aristotelian literature was introduced. The Latins were initiated to Aristotle by the Arabian philosophers who had been using his philosophy for centuries as a support for their pantheism. Forseeing this task of reconciliation, ecclesiastic authority had set up a commission only 10 days after the initial papal warning for the expressed purpose of purging Aristotle for Christian use. However, no positive results were forthcoming but were awaiting the achievements of Thomas Aquinas after 1260.¹ It must be noted that the first reaction of the church toward the Aristotelian influx was to stem its tide by papal degree. This Pope Gregory IX did in his warning not to mix philosophy and theology. However, it was soon evident that this was not sufficient, and consequently it became apparent, to some at least, that another course must be pursued. William of Auvergne (1180-1249) saw the necessity of borrowing from the enemy some weapons to fight him. He became increasingly aware that one can only triumph over philosophy as a philosopher. Following in this general direction, Albert the Great concluded that a Christian should know philosophy in all its forms. But his encyclopedic curiosity left the Greek philosophy and Christian religion yet unreconciled. It was in the genius of his pupil Thomas of Aquin that this task was soon to be realized. So great became this urge to show the compatibility of Greek philosophy and Christianity that even Beniventure who took a hostile attitude toward Aristotle said that it was the task of philosophy to render the "credible, intelligible". It was in this sense that Thomas was to bring the work of his predecessors to perfection.

THE THEOLOGICAL CONCERN

¹Ibid., p. 244.

The Problem: The Resurrection of Aristotle Threatened Theology

"St. Thomas was faced with a system of growing importance, which seemed in many ways to be incompatible with Christian tradition, yet because of its majesty, coherence, and comprehensiveness, Thomas boldly grabbed the bull by the horns and utilized Aristotle in building his own system. Thomas saw in Aristotle a potential to weld together philosophy and theology into a unified whole."¹ Such intellectual courage has led a modern scholastic to say, "St. Thomas Aquinas, the chief glory of scholasticism is the first of modern philosophers because to him is due the epochal achievement of having been the first to constitute philosophy in its own right, to give it a full consciousness of self, independence and autonomy, by establishing on fundamental principles the distinction between philosophy and theology, and assigning to each its proper domain and method".² Maritan says, "the doctrine of Aristotle did not bear its purist fruit except in the mind of St. Thomas Aquinas. Since he always remained true to all the principles of Aristotle, one may say that he is much more purely Aristotelian than Aristotle".³

Therefore, it is not difficult to see that the basic problem of the day was how to reconcile the resurrected Aristotelian philosophy with the dogma of the Church. The influx of philosophical literature and subsequent interest demanded an answer from the Church which was forthcoming in the Thomistic synthesis.

The Principle: Render Revelation Reasonable

The principle which was to give explicit answer to this problem had

¹Copleston, History of Philosophy, Vol. II, p. 322.

²Gerardo Bruni, Progressive Scholasticism, p. VIII.

³Mc Kenon, Selections from Medieval Philosophy.

long been brooding in thoughts of the scholastics. In fact, it was the basic principle of scholasticism itself, viz., that it is the task of the theologian to understand and explain dogma. "Philosophy and theology have the same content and interest...in explaining religion philosophy simply expands itself, and in expanding itself it explains religion."¹ From the medieval point of view, dogma was truth. There was no need to search for it. Therefore, there was no place for philosophy as the pursuit of truth. To philosophize meant to demonstrate the truth of revelation. Philosophy was positive theology. Thus it was that Gilson remarked, "...the only safe plan is to take revelation for our guide and make an effort to understand its contents. This understanding of the contents of revelation will be philosophy itself;...this is the basic principle of all medieval speculation".²

And so the basic method of scholasticism was to arise from its fundamental principle. If dogma is truth and the scholastic task is merely a matter of making it intelligible or reasonable, then its validity must be defended by reasoning or philosophizing about it. However, the logical consequences of this very principle and its resulting method were destined to change the very nature of the scholastic movement. For the process of rendering dogma intelligible for those who had accepted the Christian revelation as their basic premise was quite different from that of rendering the Christian revelation as rational to those who denied the basic premise of sacred Scriptures. For this was to be the very task of scholasticism with relation to the newly received Aristotelian literature which was introduced through the philosophical mold of the muslim religion. The question necessary becomes, can Christianity sustain itself on a purely rationalistic grounds that will be

¹Weber, History of Philosophy, p. 203.

²Gilson, p. 5.

acceptable to both Mohammedan and Christian? Thus it can be seen that the original intent to explain dogma had evolved to the necessity of defending it, and that on an Aristotelian basis. If Christian dogma was to survive this situation, it had to emerge from its monastery of platonic idealism and adopt an Aristotelian realism. It had to discard as apologetically relevant, the former deductive reasoning from revelation and build a rational system on an inductive basis that was in harmony with the Christian revelation.

What scholasticism most needed at this stage in its history was a philosophy based not on subjective ideas or presupposed dogma--this the Muslims had too. What was most needed, and especially in light of the growing importance of Aristotle, was a philosophical system based on Aristotelian principles alone that would nevertheless demonstrate the rationality of the universe as a revelation of God and thereby demonstrate its harmony with the Christian revelation. This is precisely what Thomas did, and with little doubt, as no other man had ever done.

At this point it should be noted that the infiltration of Aristotelian philosophy beginning at about 1200 A. D. gave about half a century for Thomas' predecessors to analyze and categorize the wealth of philosophical material he was to use in his monumental synthesis. This was very ably done in men like Albert the Great whose prodigious encyclopedic mind amassed materials from far and wide to await the intellectual scrutiny of his pupil's systematic philosophy. Others too, contributed to the stage-setting. There was, for example, Auvergne who was the first Christian to make a clear cut distinction between essence and existence¹ which was later

¹Auvergne followed Avicenna and Alforabi, two Muslim philosophers in making this distinction.

to become the very heart of the Thomistic metaphysical contribution. Thus it is not difficult to see then that "St. Thomas does not speak from some abstract philosophical heaven. It is to the 13th century that he gives voice; to that century, precisely which was the first Christian century to behold and feel the full power of the Greek philosophical genius". Mc Keon further suggests that "the real significance of St. Thomas is not seen until it is viewed in the astonishing turbulent intellectual life of his century, and that when St. Thomas is so viewed, his relation to the Greeks and their Arabian successors assume the role of a major issue in the formation of his thought".¹

The Thomistic undertaking, then, was of great proportion and one which was not easy for many reasons. There was the problem of the prevailing platonic form of theology as vs. the newly resurgent Aristotelian philosophy. There was ever the question of fidelity to the Church and its dogma and yet credibility in philosophical undertakings. In short, there was the problem of the place and relationship of philosophy to theology.

The Plan: State the Truth of Augustine in the Terms of Aristotle

How was this to be solved? What was the intent and plan of Thomas? It is the thesis of this paper that the natural theology of Aquinas resulted from his attempt to state traditionally accepted theological truth of Augustine into the newly received philosophical terms of Aristotle. Whether he succeeded or not without doing violence to either Augustine or Aristotle may be debatable, but that this is what he attempted is most evident.

However "...it must be emphasized that though St. Thomas adopted Aristotelianism as an instrument for the expression of his system, he was no blind worshipper of the philosopher, who discarded Augustine in favor of

¹Mc Keon, Selections from Medieval Philosophy, p. 2.

the pagan thinker. In theology he naturally treads in the footsteps of Augustine...."¹

Perhaps the most convincing evidence that Thomas considered himself an Augustinian can be derived from his constant authoritative references to the teaching of Augustine. Even in his most mature work, the Summa Theologica there are hundreds of references beginning, "as Augustine said," "Augustine taught," etc.² As A. A. Maurer observes, "St. Thomas could find no better words to express his goal in life than those of St. Hilory (which are thoroughly Augustinian): 'I am aware that I owe this to God as the chief duty of my life, that my every word and sense may speak of Him'".³

Of course, Thomas did not agree with Augustine's theology on every point, nor for that matter did he concur to Aristotle's philosophy on every detail; nevertheless, he was theologically an Augustinian and philosophically an Aristotelian. Of this there can be little doubt.⁴

Furthermore, as Copleston remarks, it was because "...Thomas saw in the Aristotelian system a magnificent instrument for the expression of truth and for the welding together of the divine truths of theology and philosophy..." that he so proceeds.⁵ Gilson also agrees with Copleston saying,

¹Copleston, History of Philosophy, p. 323.

²Judging by the "Index of Authors" compiled by A. C. Pegis in the Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Vol. II, Augustine is referred to more than any other author besides Aristotle. The index lists references as follows: Aristotle (16 pp.), Augustine (10 pp.), Dennis (4 pp.), Gregory the Great (1 p.), John of Damascene (1½ pp.).

³A. A. Maurer, Medieval Philosophy, p. 163.

⁴It is true that Thomas did not ally himself with the 'Augustinians' of his day, in fact, they were his opponents. The reason for this, however, is because Thomas was ruining their platonic kind of Augustinianism. See A. A. Pegis, "Introduction" in Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, pp. xl and xlviii--xldx.

⁵Copleston, op. cit., p. 322.

"But even Thomas Aquinas would have considered himself a true disciple of Augustine. In point of fact, few men have had better reason for doing so".¹

The remaining question, and a big one, is how this plan was to be actualized in the thoughts of Aquinas, i.e., what was the resulting Natural Theology² to be?

THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONTRIBUTION

How we Know About God: Epistemology

The first³ Question is the epistemological one. How do we know according to Aquinas. We know by a process of abstraction and intentionality. That is, all knowledge comes to us via the gateway of the senses⁴ and is acted upon by the "agent intellect"⁵ which abstracts the "intelligible species" from the "sensible species" and apprehends the "quiddity" of the

¹Gilson, op. cit., p. 81.

²We chose to limit the Natural theology of Aquinas to the existence and nature of God for want of time and space, though of course it included much more.

³This was by no means the first question for St. Thomas. His starting point was the reality of finite existence as apprehended by man. He has a "common sense" modified realism view and saw no need to give explicit formalization to his epistemology prior to his metaphysics as has been necessary since the days of Kant and Hume. In fact, to demand this of him would be a gross anachronism. "To begin an historical exposition of St. Thomas's philosophy by a theory of knowledge...would scarcely represent St. Thomas' own procedure...on the other hand, St. Thomas certainly wrote some philosophical works before he composed the *Summa Theologica*, and the proofs for the existence of God in the latter work obviously presuppose a good many philosophical ideas. Moreover, as those philosophical ideas are not mere ideas, but are, on the principles of St. Thomas's own philosophy, abstracted from experience of the concrete, there seems to me ample justification for starting with the concrete sensible world of experience and considering some of St. Thomas's theories about it before going on to consider his natural theology." Coppleston, op. cit., p. 307.

⁴There is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses.

⁵This is akin to Augustine's theory of "divine illumination" only is indigenous to man.

thing. That is, the intellect by virtue of its participation¹ in the likeness of God has the transcendent power to abstract universals from particulars and concepts from images divesting them of their limiting and differentiating characteristics and apprehending their essential nature. In short, we do know things as they are in themselves, and the first principles of knowledge are transcendentally and ontologically valid.² But these first principles are themselves abstracted from sensory experience when the mind first comes into contact with it. The mind has a capacity for the principles but the principles themselves are not innate.³ It follows therefore that, "the only road which can lead us to a knowledge of the Creator must be cut through the things of sense".⁴ So the knowledge of God is to be arrived at through a knowledge of the external world. The latter is self-evident and immediate; the former is inferential and analogical. This leads naturally to one other necessary connective between epistemology and natural theology, viz., the Analogy entes. Although it seems logically necessary to mention it here, a discussion of it is reserved until latter where Thomas' defense will be given.

What we Know About God: Metaphysics

The real starting point for Natural Theology is to be found in the external world which is immediately known by a process of transcendent intentionality and abstraction through the medium of sensory experience. More particularly, the starting point is with the fact of "change" as

¹Aquinas, Summa I, Qt. 84, Art. 5.

²Garrigou-LaGrange, God, His Nature and Existence, p. 111 ff.

³Gilson, The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas, p. 230. "The intellection of these principles is no more innate than the conclusions of deductive arguments...."

⁴Gilson, op. cit., p. 64.

apprehended in the external world upon which he begins to construct his natural theology. "St. Thomas thus discovers in the heart of all finite being a certain instability, a contingency or non-necessity, which immediately points to the existence of a Being which is the source of finite existence, the author of the composition between essence and existence...."¹

"...one might argue at once from the changes in the coporeal world to the existence of an unmoved mover, with the aid of the principle that an infinite regress in the order of dependence is impossible...."²

That God is: His Existence.—Although St. Thomas elaborated five proofs for God's existence it is not difficult to see that it is the third one (from contingency) that is most consonant with his epistemology and is implied in the others. As Copleston says,

...among these five proofs he gives a certain preference to the first (from motion), to the extent of calling it the via manifestior. However, whatever we may think of this assertion, the fundamental proof or 'way', is that from contingency. In the first proof the argument from contingency is applied to the special fact of motion or change, in the second proof to the order of causality or causal production, in the fourth proof to degrees of perfection and in the fifth proof to finality, to the co-operation of inorganic objects in the attainment of cosmic order. The argument from contingency itself is based on the fact that everything must have a sufficient reason, the reason why it exists change or motion must have its sufficient reason in an unmoved mover, the series of secondary cause and effects in an uncaused cause, limited perfection in absolute perfection and finality and order in nature to an Intelligent Designer."³

If this be so, then the connection between epistemology and natural theology can be seen more readily. That is to say, when one beholds a world of many beings which are in constant change and attempts to account for it, he is driven to the conclusion that a Necessary, Uncaused,

¹Copleston, op. cit., p. 334-35.

²Ibid., p. 333.

³Ibid., p. 345.

Unlimited being exists. Thus it can be stated in the following way from the standpoint of efficient causality.¹ 1) The beings of man's experience are caused to exist by an efficient cause. (If they were not, they would be uncaused which would be to say that they are infinite or unlimited, but they are limited and therefore must be caused.) 2) Now this cause is either caused or uncaused. 3) But it is impossible to have an infinite series of existentially dependant causes. (There must be a first cause to peg the series on, e.g., a nail to hang the chain on, or a bottom block holding up the whole pile.) 4) Therefore, there is a first Uncaused cause of the beings of man's experience.²

What God is: His Essence.—So it may be said in a very real sense that the existence of God³ is proven via efficient causality, from the contingent effect to the Necessary Cause. And once it has been asserted that there is an Uncaused Cause it has already been asserted implicitly what God is, viz., that He is the Cause of all existence. So when the existence of God has been proven, it has been simultaneously declared "something" as to what His essence is. The former cannot be proved without the latter.⁴ In fact, all man knows in a positive way about the nature of God is explicated from this fact of God's uncaused causality.⁵ How is this done? By the process of negation or remotion. That is, it is known that God is not

¹Efficient causality is in a sense the basic principle operative in the contingency to necessity argument or vice versa.

²Taken from class notes of Fr. Toner, U. of D., 1956.

³It may be objected here that St. Thomas begs the issue when he says, "and this all men call god". However, he does not intend that this should prove the point but merely sketch the argument.

⁴This isn't a point of universal agreement among Thomists but it does seem to be Thomas' view.

⁵Class notes, Fr. Toner, U. of D., 1956.

caused, not limited, not contingent, etc. and hence the origin of the names (attributes) of God, viz., He is not finite (or Infinite); He is not composed (or Simple); He is not in time (or Eternal) etc. In fact, it may be said that God is not "anything" that involves or follows from finitude, composition or contingency. Syllogistically, it may be put this way: God is not limited, but "such and such" involves limitation, therefore, God is not "such and such".

Hence, one after another the negative characteristics of this Uncaused Cause may be asserted by a remotion of Him from any form of limitation. This would further necessitate one's saying that God is Immense (not in space), One (not many), Absolute (not relative), Immutable (not changeable) since all of these involve some form of change, composition, or contingency.

In other words, it has been shown that God is (causally) and what God is not (negatively), but can it be shown what God is (positively)? To this the answer is given: Yes and no. No, if it is meant that a man can in this life fully comprehend the essence of God in itself¹ and yes if it is meant that one can have a substantial knowledge of God's essence though not completely. And this latter knowledge comes via the analogy entis. St. Thomas argues that there must be "some" similarity between the cause and its effects. Since he has proven that God is cause of all creation (finite being) then one may examine the creation to see "something" of the Creator.

The simplest way to state his argument is that it is impossible for a cause to give what it hasn't got. But God has given all perfections that creation possesses. Therefore, God must (in some way) possess all these

¹This man will have in the beatific vision when the essence of God will become the form or intelligible species of man's intellect.

Perfections Himself. These He may have either formally or virtually.¹ So then, any perfection (not imperfection) found in the creature may be attributed "analogically" to the Creator. That is, one may abstract from it its connotative diversities and apply its denotative identity to God. So then since one finds the perfections of will, intellect, love, providence, goodness, etc. in creatures he may say that God possesses will, intellect, love, etc. Thus Thomas would demonstrate in a positive way the essential nature of God.

A further word about the nature of analogical attribution will help to clarify what is meant by this positive knowledge. For St. Thomas, there are only three possible kinds of knowledge, univocal, equivocal, and analogical. Now man's knowledge of God cannot be univocal (entirely the same) for then man's knowledge would be infinite. Neither can it be equivocal (entirely different) for then man could know nothing about God. Therefore, man's knowledge of God must be analogical, i.e., at once alike and different or "partly"² the same and "partly" different. Or to put it another way, even though there is an infinite degree of difference in perfection between God and man there is nevertheless not a total lack of similarity. Man's knowledge of God may be almost but not altogether equivocal. There is a little resemblance as well as a great remotion and this all based on our relation to God as effect to cause.

THE FINAL CONSIDERATION

Now the crucial question finally emerges, viz., is all of this really stating the truth of Augustine into the terms of Aristotle or is it a con-

¹Garrigou-LaGrange, op. cit.

²The word "part" must not be taken to imply that there are necessarily "parts" in analogous knowledge. It is a knowledge of proportionality not proportions. See Klubertanz, Introduction to the Philosophy of Being, p. 61 ff.

cession to the content of Aristotle while claiming allegiance to Augustine but nevertheless departing from him?

Certainly, it must be said that Thomas did at least use the terminology of Aristotle, if not more. As Mc Keon remarked: "The real significance of St. Thomas is not seen until it is viewed in the astonishing turbulent intellectual life of his century, and that when St. Thomas is so viewed, his relation to the Greeks...assume(s) the role of a major issue in the formation of his thought".¹ With this there can be little disagreement as well as the fact that in a sense he "Aristotelianized Christianity" or "Christianized Aristotle", however, it would seem to be likewise necessary to admit that the case cannot be dismissed on a priori grounds saying that he must have departed from Augustine merely because he spoke Aristotle's language. But rather, the case must be decided on an inductive and comparative basis. And the most basic question in this analysis will concern their respective views on Nature and Grace or Revelation and Reason. If substantial agreement can be shown at this point, it would certainly seem to follow that the detailed delination of Thomas Aristotelian viewed did not take him substantially afield from the spirit of Augustine.

Reason and Revelation

To answer this question, it may be first stated that while both for Augustine and Aquinas the exercise of reason was intended to explain and defend dogma, nevertheless, Aquinas attempted his defense by a much sharper division of the two domains. However, even though it may appear that in so doing Thomas has conceded to Aristotle and departed from Augustine, nevertheless,

¹Mc Keon, op. cit., p. 2.

...he does not differ from St. Augustine so much as has been sometimes asserted, though he defined the spheres of the two sciences of philosophy and theology more clearly than Augustine had defined them; what he did was to express Augustinianism in terms of the Aristotelian philosophy... though he cannot be said to have adopted a starting point in philosophy totally different from that of Augustine.¹

"Thomas gives a theoretical distinction; Augustine a de facto one. The former safeguards of the doctrine of supernatural and power of natural man. Augustine considers man in the concrete with a supernatural end."² In other words, "there is a formal difference but not completely a material difference."³ The problem for St. Thomas was not "...how to introduce philosophy into theology without corrupting the essence and nature of philosophy, but how to introduce philosophy without corrupting the essence and nature of theology".⁴ It was precisely in this respect that he proceeded and in this manner that he succeeded.

Hence, it is the contention of this paper that St. Thomas did put the essential truths of Augustine into the terms of Aristotle without corrupting the former or converting the latter. He gave definition to a theoretical separation of the domains of faith and reason without unduly exalting the latter or destroying the former. But even for Thomas there was the recognition

...that the truth about God is arrived at by human reason only by a few men and after a long time and with the admixture of many errors...either because of over hastiness in jumping to conclusions or because of the influence of passion or of imagination...he acknowledges theoretically the weakness of the human intellect in its present condition, though not its radical perversion.⁵

¹Oplesyon, op. cit., p. 318.

²Ibid., p. 49.

³Ibid., p. 313.

⁴Ibid., p. 306.

⁵Ibid., p. 321

or as Gilson remarks,

The end from which scholastic theology takes its start is not natural reason armed with its principles, but indeed the arteculi fidei, and that towards which it tends is not an evacuation of the mystery, but the submission of the intellect to the mystery of Christ: bring into captivity every understanding unto the obedience of Christ.¹

Though "St. Thomas certainly believed that it is theoretically possible for the philosopher to work out a true metaphysical system without recourse to revelation,"² yet in actual fact he did not do so himself nor was it his contention that such a system would have ever been worked out apart from the "historical" aid of revelation.³ Even the Summa Theologia and the Summa Contra Gentiles make repeated reference to the authority of Scripture and the Fathers, nor does Thomas begin by proving that God exists. The Summa Theologia begins by asking whether theology is a science. This reflects the important issue of the day, viz., the relation between theology and science or philosophy. To answer this question was to reconcile the Christian monastery with the Greek metaphysics. This issue involved not only a struggle between Christian wisdom and Greek philosophy, "but also a debate among Christian thinkers as to the conditions governing the reception of Greek philosophy".⁴ And the Thomistic synthesis must be viewed as a direct answer to this situation. "For if the philosophical significance of St. Thomas is not to be found in his diagnosis of Greek and Arabian philosophy as in an open book, then it simply does not exist."⁵

¹Gilson, Christianity and Philosophy, p. 32.

²Copleston, op. cit., p. 318.

³Class notes, Fr. Toner, Fr. Hitter, U. of D., 1956.

⁴A. C. Pegis, Introduction to Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, p. XXXVII.

⁵Ibid., p. XL.

So then, in practice St. Thomas himself never built a "pure" philosophy but always utilizes the aid of theology along side it. That is,

St. Thomas' philosophy should thus be regarded in the light of its relation to theology, and it is a mistake to collect the philosophical items from St. Thomas's works, including his theological works, and construct a system out of them according to one's own idea of what a philosophical system should be, even though St. Thomas would very likely have refused to recognise such a system as corresponding to his actual intentions.¹

Even though the Thomistic system of natural theology does not take any of its premises from revelation, yet it is highly improbable that such a system would have arisen apart from the historical aid of revelation.

Of course, it must be admitted that in so systemizing that the resultant product of St. Thomas differed somewhat from that of Augustines, but the divergence is one of degree and not of kind, and yet in the process he remained true to the basic principles of Augustine although in some cases it was necessary to give fuller expression to them.

In relation to this it may be a slight exaggeration to say, "Augustine's philosophy contained nothing of value which was not much better said by St. Thomas, more clearly delineated and defined...."² Nevertheless, as Gilson puts it,

It will always be legitimate to attempt the construction of a metaphysics on the basis of the presence in our minds of the idea of God, provided, however, that we do not attempt a deduction a priori with its starting point in God, but an induction a posteriori with its starting point in the content of our conception of God. Perhaps it would not be impossible to show that, in this sense, the Thomist method is necessary to bring the Augustinian to a full consciousness of its own nature and legitimate condition of exercise....³

Abstraction and Illumination

¹Copleston, op. cit., p. 306-307.

²Ibid., p. 50.

³Gilson, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, p. 139.

One of the strongest contentions to the opposite of this conclusion is the alleged difference between the Thomistic "active intellect" and the Augustinian "divine illumination". Certainly, it can not be contended that Thomas here followed the basic principle of Augustine. The answer to this lies in a natural application of the law of secondary causes. As Gilson writes,

...the efficacy of second causes lies in the second causes themselves, as a participation of the Divine causality. Certainly they do not create, but they cause; as substances themselves they generate, not indeed being, but at least substantially. By a natural application of the same principle, St. Thomas modifies the economy of the Augustinian illumination, and invests it with new significance. The fundamental thesis of illumination remains intact. In Thomism as in Augustinianism, we know the truth only in the divine ideas and by the light with which the word enlightens us; but now it enlightens us in another manner. According to St. Thomas illumination consists precisely in the gift, made by God to man in His creation, of that which it is of the very essence of the Augustinian noetic to deny--that is to say, an intellect sufficient to produce truth. From the time of St. Thomas we are henceforth in the possession of a natural light, that of the active intellect which is neither Augustine's mind nor Aristotle's active intellect. Like the latter, it is capable, on contact with sensible experience, of generating first principles, and, with the aid of these, it will gradually build up a system of sciences; but like the Augustinian mind, it is capable of generating these truths only because it is itself a participation in the Truth. But instead of an intellect naturally lacking the light of truth into which therefore this light must fall from on high, we have an intellect with which this truth is, so to speak, incorporated, or rather an intellect which has itself become this light of truth, in an analogical mode of course, and by way of participation.¹

Similarly, Copleston admits that Thomas does not speak of "Illumination" in "the full Augustinian sense,"² but by expressing Augustine in Aristotle's terms he does not do injustice either to the principle or glory of the Augustinian concept but merely places it in the sphere of the

¹Gilson, The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy, p. 139.

²Copleston, op. cit., p. 389.

creature's divine endowment by nature rather than invoking the constant necessity for supernatural intervention in the natural processes of thought.

"As St. Thomas says, when God makes a nature, He makes it able to operate, to act by its powers; He does not constantly interfere with it, like an inefficient mechanic who cannot quite succeed in making a machine that works."¹

So that we may conclude that there is no substantial difference between the Augustinian and Thomistic view of the nature of Faith and Reason, at least no radical disjunction, and hence it may be maintained that the Thomistic natural theology is materially Augustinian while formally Aristotelian. And that the areas of conflict between the two systems are more linguistical than logical; more semantical than substantial. As Gilson puts it,

The Thomists will accept the Augustian solution of the question as soon as the Augustinians recognize that even for a Christian, reason is essentially distinct from faith, and philosophy from religion; and, since St. Augustine himself recognized it, the distinction seems quite sufficiently Augustinian. The Augustinians, on the other hand, will accept the Thomist solution when the Thomists recognize that for a Christian, reason is not divorced from faith in the sphere of its exercise; now St. Thomas recognized it, and there seems to be nothing from preventing a Thomist doing likewise.²

¹Klubertanz, Philosophy of Human Nature, p. 170.

²Gilson, op. cit., p. 12.

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