

ARTICLE IV.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF AQUINAS.

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THE vastest and most systematic genius of the Middle Ages was Saint Thomas Aquinas. His architectonic work, the "*Summa Theologica*," embodies the whole philosophy of that epoch, expounded in the spirit of the time. That spirit was the spirit of Aristotle. Aquinas became the best representative of Scholasticism. Rosmini, who, in his "*Teodicea*," speaks of Aquinas as chief among Italian philosophers, set himself to perfect the philosophy of Aquinas by purging it of this Aristotelian leaven, with the pantheistic-materialistic tendency it bore. Aquinas, however, had borne so great respect to the teachings of Aristotle that only when they came into tolerably clear antagonism to Christian truth did he deviate from them. It is thus easy to see why Thomism as a system lacked in logical completeness, acute and massive as it was.

But Aquinas is not to be thought of as a mere reproducer of Aristotle, as is sometimes said; rather is it true to say that, with the aid of Aristotle and the fathers, he brought forth a philosophy all his own. For such fathers as Athanasius, Basil, the Gregories, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Augustine, were all used by Aquinas, whose Aristotelianism is brightened with an effluence of Platonic elevation, and touched with the charm of Socratic method. Aquinas gave system to the teachings of the fathers, the Areopagite, and the Lombard, doing for them, in reducing them to scientific form, what Aristotle had done for the Greeks, Egyptians, and Pythagoreans.

Aquinas was, as we have just indicated, conversant with Plato and Aristotle, but also with the Alexandrians and Arabians. He includes substantially the whole teaching of his great predecessor, Augustine, whose "De Civitate Dei" was, in spite of its defects, the nearest approach to the "Summa Theologica."

The procedure of philosophy—that of a rational ascent—which Augustine had so well described, is set forth by Aquinas also. Those who come to Aquinas will, as it has been put, find "their intellectual food cooked for them." The fullness of his contents, the fineness of his distinctions, the depth of his thought, and the sharp-sighted clearness of his judgments,—all mark him out as the great thinker he was. His aim was to shape philosophy so that its support should be gained for the upholding of Christian truth or doctrine.

As a philosopher, Aquinas sets out from a principle from which he never seems to deviate, namely, the principle of the demonstration of the infinite by means of the finite. Aquinas declares that reason can perceive and prove God through his works, for the existence of God is demonstrated by its effects—the invisible God is seen in his visible effects. And, indeed, Aquinas, after Albertus Magnus, gives final expression to the distinction between natural and revealed theology; natural theology simply signifying the doctrine of God, as established without revelation, to be found in the philosophy of Aristotle. In the case of natural religion, Aquinas took reason to be parallel with revelation in its working; whereas, in revealed religion, reason has merely ancillary functions, and works in subordination to revelation. God is an ineffable Being, in the view of Aquinas, and is raised above human knowledge. God is to Aquinas, as he has said, after Aristotle, the Prime Motor. He holds we must advance from finite effect to infinite cause; for, though such effect may not reveal the entire cause, it can

yet prove that it exists. Aquinas clung to the absoluteness of Deity, and did not fail to separate him wholly from all created things.

But indeed it was rather the externality of finite things to God, and their *quasi* independence of him, that Aquinas emphasized, making the category of causality the keystone of his thought. Of the alternatives of the Schoolmen, Aquinas preferred to lay stress on the *universalia in re*, and so laid stress on the creaturely essence, that the hold of Divine immanence was loosened. He, in fact, displaced the ontological argument of Anselm, that he might set up the Divine Existence in a *posteriori* fashion, since he thought the argument, to be complete, must be, at one and the same time, *a priori* and *a posteriori*. The reason lay in his accounting God the only being at once ideal and real, or whose ideality was identical with reality. God was to him *actus purus*, the absolutely reasonable substance, in whom will is subordinate to reason.

Two forms of being are found by Aquinas in God—real being and ideal being, the former viewing God in himself, the latter regarded him as archetypal idea. This distinction of being in God is afterwards found in Rosmini, but is not due to him. Aquinas holds it impossible to know ideal being in God, without knowing his real being. The trend of the thought of Aquinas is unfavorable to ontologism, which has sometimes professed to shield itself behind his authority. Man's knowledge of God, according to Aquinas, is analogical in character. Being and essence are not distinguished in God: his essence is his being, says the "Summa." By being he means the actuality of every form or nature. God is to him distinguished as the self-existent being—a necessarily existing essence. This metaphysical essence of Deity is root and foundation of his specific attributes, as we shall see.

As God alone is being by his essence, for that his essence is his being, so every creature is being *by participation*, and its essence is not its being. The Divine immensity is, to Saint Thomas, an absolute attribute, the totality of the Divine essence not being something commensurable with totality of place. God is in his Word: the Word is God: the Word God is the Idea. For the word, Aquinas expressly says, conceived in the mind, represents all that we actually comprehend. In God there is a unique Idea, and this Idea is God himself. The idea is the divine essence with Saint Thomas, which all things imitate, in so far as they are good.

As to the world, Aquinas says reason cannot apodictically show that the world was made in time. The eternity of creation he does not affirm, though he does not think it can be refuted, so repugnant to reason is a beginning of created things. He allows that the philosophers have been able to recognize the first thing, but denies that they have, independently of faith and by use of their reason, been able to demonstrate that creation took place in time. Saint Thomas avers that the most universal causes produce the most universal effects, and the most universal effect, he thinks, is being. There is no impression which the mind more fundamentally gathers, in the view of Aquinas, from the object than that of being.

This idea of being is the first of all first principles, and may be expressed in the negative formula, "Being is not not-being." Then being, he argues, must be the proper effect of the first and most universal cause, which is God. Creation is to him properly the work of God, who produces being absolutely. And the visible world is created after ideas that are externally existent in the Divine Mind, such ideas being of the essence of God—yea, being, in fact, God. But the separateness of God from the creation has to be softened down, and this

is effected by Aquinas through insisting on God as being in all things by his presence and power. When his First Cause—which, we have seen, he conceives as *actus purus*—has been obtained, he must needs endow Him with attributes which will explain particular effects in nature and in man. He makes God one; personal, spiritual, clothes him with perfect goodness, truth, will, intelligence, love, and other attributes. The world of effects he thinks is yet like him, though they are distinct; for the effect resembles the cause, and the cause is, in sense, in the effect.

Aquinas starts from created beings in his mode of rising to God. He has a stringent definition of creation as “a production of a thing according to its whole substance” (*productio alicujus rei secundum suam totam substantiam*), to which is significantly added, “nothing being presupposed, whether created or increate” (*nullo praeposito, quod sit vel increatum vel ab aliquo creatum*). Creation, that is to say, is the production of being in itself, independently of matter as subject. He distinguishes causality which is creative from causality which is merely alterative. He recognizes non-being as before being. Creation is to Aquinas the “primary action” (*prima actio*), possible to the “primary agent” (*agens primum*) alone. Material form for him depends on primary matter, being consequent on the change produced by efficient cause. And Aquinas has much to say of the *rappports* between substance and its accidents, and of form as that by which a thing is what it is. Intelligence, he expressly says, knows being absolutely, and without distinction of time. The processes whereby reason, as the active force of the soul, rises, for Aquinas, to God, are those of causality (*causalitatis*), excellence or eminence (*excellentiae* or *eminentiae*), and negation (*negationis*). All goodness and perfection for Aquinas

exist preëminently in God. Not always free from danger, however, is his mode of speaking, as for example, when he makes God simply the actuality of all things and separates potentiality from him, or when he tends to identify thought and being. Being he expressly regards as itself the most perfect of all things, in virtue of its actuality; being itself is to him the actuality of all things, and even of their ideas.

Aquinas holds to two degrees of Divine intelligibility: the first degree comes to us by natural light, and to the second degree we are guided by supernatural illumination. This distinction has a very fundamental place with Aquinas, and he thinks our confused and unpractised vision has need to grow in the use of the latter or higher light. So it, no doubt, has, but his former position that God, as Creator and Lord, is known through the things that are made, is one which seems rather to exceed the view possible to modern philosophy of religion, so deeply affected by Kantian and post-Kantian agnosticism. The light of human reason he holds to be a participation in the uncreated light of Divine reason; he takes the first principle to be known *naturally*, such knowledge being of God as the Author of Nature; and he regards this principle as the source of all human science and knowledge. It is on such a strong and assured foundation he will build his philosophical edifice.

God, having put within the soul its intellectual light, its knowledge of those first principles, which are the germs of the sciences, is, *par excellence*, the cause of human science in his view. Divine Reason is for him the law of all created things, and such law is eternal. In virtue of God's intelligence, his life is, for Aquinas, as for Aristotle, immortal and eternal. And the human soul, which is for Aquinas most perfect of all the forms which matter is capable of receiving, is, in his view,

also immortal, being the sole form which survives the dissolution of its corporeal organization. The soul is to him a being proper, an immortal substance, which comes not by generation, but proceeds from God by creation. It is important to observe, before we pass from these aspects, that Aquinas expressly holds intelligence to know being absolutely, and without distinction of time. Therein he has his points of contact with the thought of Augustine and of Dante.

We cannot dwell on the amazing comprehensiveness and subtlety of the religious and metaphysical philosophy of Aquinas: we have his ethical philosophy also to examine, but it can be best understood when his whole system of thought is kept in full view. The whole is to him always present in the part, but it is his philosophy in whole we shall most connectedly find from a broad survey of its parts. It may at this point be fitly recalled that his "Summa" is not only the Christian religion thrown into scientific form, but is also the orderly exposition of what a man should be. Hence the vision of the Divine Essence, of whom he treats with such theologic power and fullness, is for him that perfect blessedness which he takes to be the ultimate end of man. God also, as absolute activity of thought and will, he takes to act for an end, which everything in the world subserves.

The high dignity of man is found by Aquinas mainly in his will, only there is this trouble, that man is apt, in the thought of Aquinas, not to carry sufficient answer, in his original spiritual constitution, to the commands of supreme will imposed upon him. He is more scientific than Augustine or Anselm in his treatment of the will—a treatment closely related to other parts of his philosophy. Though his psychology is so largely drawn from Aristotle, yet his theory of the will has the merit to be much more complete than Aristotle's, and

has exerted large influence on European philosophy. He sets, as we have seen, the Divine will in a relation of dependence on the Divine intellect. So, in respect of man's nature likewise, Aquinas held the far-reaching doctrine that intellect is supreme; to him what reason approved, will obeyed. The good is commanded by God, in his view, because it is good, and recognized by his wisdom to be so. He holds will as a rational power, to be due to God. God both makes and moves it, but only to the willing of the good.

With fine clearness the Angelic Doctor says that God moves the will of man as universal mover and without this universal motion man cannot will anything, but at the same time man determines himself under application of his reason to a particular volition. Sometimes God moves men, he thinks, to a determinate particular volition of good, such being the case, in his view, of those whom God moves by his grace. But, even then, the grace, though pre-moving, is not predetermining. And grace, it may be said, is, in the system of Aquinas, rather apt to wear an external and accidental character, and to assume the form of power that is mechanical rather than vital in its cast.

Aquinas holds the object to which the will tends, to be presented by the intellect, and not by the will itself. Intellect is necessary in order to will, hence intellect is for him higher. Will, however, can direct intellect, and will is lord of its own life. The will of God predestinates, but necessity is not imposed on events, neither is contingency removed. Aquinas can say that this or that particular action of a determinate character is not owing to any other agency than the will itself (*non est ab alio determinante, sed ab ipsa voluntate*).

Perhaps one ought to say that freedom, as it is found in Aquinas, seems to exist rather too verbally, and not to be sufficiently real. He is apt to appear as though trying to retain

freedom and determinism at one and the same time. There is no lack of stress on freedom, as, for example, when he says the being is free that can rule its own action, for he is free who is the cause of himself; whereas that which is, by a sort of necessity, driven to action, is, he holds, in a state incompatible with freedom. Yet, though man's turning to God is ascribed by him to free-will, this turning of the will is declared impossible unless God himself so turn it. So that, on the one hand, Aquinas in the clearest manner declares movement of the will to be nothing less than inclination of the will itself towards the thing wished. On the other hand, he affirms that God alone can change the will, for that he alone is cause of the power of inclination—cause, in fact, of the will, which he alone can efficaciously move.

On which it may be remarked that the will may, no doubt, be moved by itself as intrinsic cause, and may yet be open to be moved by God in his grace as extrinsic cause, so that there is no real inconsistency. And yet it seems not easy to hold the presentation of Aquinas to be quite unambiguous, and this more or less equivocal character of freedom in his hands is more surprising in view of his genuine doctrine of Creation, with the distinctness of the world from God which it involves.

In respect of the Divine relation to evil, Aquinas teaches that the sinful act is both being and act, and that God is, no doubt, the cause of all action *considered as act*. But then, says Saint Thomas, sin is more than being and act; it is a defect—a defect springing from free-will as its cause, and not to be referred to God. That is to say, he makes God the cause of the act where there is sin, but not the cause of sin, since he is not the cause of the defect which there is in the act. His view of the character of evil is thus negative.

The optimism of Aquinas was of more moderate character

than that of Leibniz, or Malebranche, or Rosmini. As against the strong optimism of Abelard, Aquinas held that God could create another world better than this present one, but could not create one better adapted to the end for which this world has been made. It is by the end in view, he thinks, the order adopted must be judged. Divine Wisdom is limited to a determined order, only as the end chosen requires the best particular means of attaining it.

The soul itself is, in the "Summa," viewed—as already indicated—as the *substantial form* of a physical organic body endowed with rational life. This was in accordance with the theory of the Scholastics as to a radical substratum called *materia prima*—primary matter. His doctrine of the soul must wear to us a very materialistic aspect, unless it be carefully remembered that this substantial form was taken to be immaterial and perfectly simple. He expressly says that the human soul, which is called intellect or mind, is something incorporeal and self-subsisting. So the rational soul, he thinks, is properly said to have being, and to have been created or made. For being made (*fieri*) ends in being. Not from pre-existing corporeal matter could it have been made, or it would then be corporeal; and not from pre-existing spiritual matter, as in that case spiritual substances would be mutually transformed; therefore he holds it could only have been by creation. To him the soul, as immaterial, was immortal, and could not be conceived as otherwise. Man is to him the intermediate link between material life and spiritual or immaterial activity.

In his philosophy of knowledge, Aquinas makes man's cognitive power—like the soul from which it emanates—partake of a double character, material and immaterial. All knowledge begins for him from the data of sensuous perception.

He distinctly says that our knowledge comes first from the senses, but maintains this does not mean that our sense-cognition is the complete and perfect cause of our knowledge, but rather that it supplies the material of the cause. He discards the notion of innate ideas. The intellectual faculty consisted of the active intellect (*intellectus agens*), and the passive intellect (*intellectus possibilis*). Aquinas held to the objective value of our knowledge in the most complete manner. The universe was for him mirrored—ideally and immaterially—in the mind of man, just as the likeness of a person is on a photographic plate. Such, in brief, was his epistemological position.

What men call Fate, Saint Thomas considers to be nothing but Divine Providence in its meanings and effects. Things which here seem done by accident are, he holds, to be referred to some pre-ordaining cause, which is Divine Providence. After Boëthius, he speaks of Providence as the Lord of the universe himself, directing all things according to his eternal plan (*divina ratio in summo omnium principe constituta, quae cuncta disponit*). But he does not allow that one is attributing things human to fate, because one may choose to call the will and power of Deity itself by the name of fate. One must say, however, that his own stress on Divine causality in second causes is apt to make Providence appear no more than fate in some sort, a circumstance which seems due to the influence of Arabian interpreters like Avicenna. And yet it seems due to him to say that as against the Arabian philosophers, Aquinas is not without strivings to recognize the efficiency of the second causes through which Deity works. His deterministic leanings were seen in his postulation of influence on interior constraint or inclination.

We may now make some remarks on features of this impos-

ing philosophy of the Middle Ages. Its realistic character is obvious, the real being for Aquinas the rational. He completed, in a Christian sense, the work of Aristotle. He vindicated the superiority of the contemplative life, as Aristotle had done, making the contemplation of God—the vision of his being or essence—at once highest good and highest truth. We have in Aquinas a fusion of dialectics and mysticism. To dialectics we owe his system, with its theory of the superiority of intellect to will, and its organic connection of dogmas. To mysticism were due alike its base in love, and its apex in the beatific vision of God. His thought had been affected by the mystical agnosticism of Dionysius the Areopagite, on which he made some notable advances. His mind had suffered a strange cleavage whereby the Divine and the earthly became parted into two quite separate worlds. This dualism was due to an ecclesiastical supernaturalism so strong as to prove able to lay the foundation of his system on this dualistic basis.

The bold character of his ontology strikes the mind, which finds the match of it only in Hegel. Less direct, and less pantheistic, was his view of creation as emanating from God than that of his master, Albertus Magnus, and so he represented the active will of Deity as that which, as Thought, wills and creates. The idea of order, as a ruling idea of the Middle Ages, finds in him its most symmetrical and proportionate expression. He develops it into a great living system, connecting the most manifold and diverse interests, so that therefrom he, with systematizing genius, builds up an all-embracing world-view. Christianity he brings into closer relation with science and culture, as these then existed. For grace comes to perfect nature, not to destroy it (*gratia naturam non tollit sed perficit*). A leader of the Christendom of his own

time Aquinas was, making truth the quest of his comprehensive mode of thinking. For the most part, he made knowledge and theoretic reason precede will and practical reason, and this rational element is a very precious feature in Thomistic philosophy. The being of God, the grounding of the world in him, and the soul's immortality, are to Aquinas truths already discoverable by reason. Reason is to him the precursor of faith, and with the independence of the former he joins its subordination to the truth of Christian revelation. Perhaps one should not err in estimating the elevation of his life, and his mild persistency in his immense task, as greater than his elevation above his own time. But it is certainly a tribute to his realizing in himself the highest developed thought of his time, that the mighty Dante sits so closely to the thought of the Angelic Doctor.

There can hardly be a doubt that the defensive attitude of Aquinas towards Platonism bore him further towards empiricism than would otherwise have been the case. The influence of Aquinas on the subsequent history of religious thought was undoubtedly great, and has lived on into the dogmatic thought of to-day even in the Protestant world. This was largely the result of Melancthon's having taken up positions in sympathy with the Aristotelianism of Aquinas. Among subsequent thinkers influenced by Aquinas must be reckoned Spinoza, whose ethical and metaphysical philosophy owed much to ideas derived from the Angelic Doctor. For the place of Aquinas in the history of ethics is certainly not less important than his significance for the history of religious thought. In fine, one can think of no higher tribute to his work than is found in the fact that the greatest need of the world to-day is just that of an Aquinas to do for its vast body of synthetic knowledge what the Angelic Doctor did for that of the Middle Ages.