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ANALYTICAL THOMISM

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ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHERS have become increasingly interested in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Several factors help to explain this phenomenon. A remote cause is the work of Peter Geach, who both modeled and validated serious analytic study of Thomas; many of those writing in the analytic tradition today owe an obvious debt to Geach. Another remote cause has been the renewed interest in medieval philosophy among analytic philosophers. More proximately, the emergence of philosophy of religion as an accepted analytic speciality has also spurred interest in Thomas. As a result, Aquinas is now taken seriously as a philosopher by many trained within the Anglo-American tradition that previously would have been inclined to consign him to the pre-Frege dustbin of benighted thinking.

Indeed, analytic interest in Aquinas has now reached the point where some writing in this vein consider themselves to be "Analytic Thomists." A recent issue of *The Monist* (vol. 80, no. 4 [October 1997]) is entirely devoted to Analytical Thomism and a forthcoming volume in the Oxford Companion to Philosophy series will explore the same topic. While Thomists of every stripe should be glad to see Aquinas get his analytical due, many traditional readers of Aquinas will doubtless wonder whether "Analytical Thomism" is oxymoronic in the same way that "Transcendental Thomism" seemed so. Can one really be both a Thomist *and* an analytic philosopher? Are the basic philosophical commitments of the one compatible with those of the other? A

close look at *The Monist* volume, which is the purpose of this essay, will hopefully shed some light on this topic.

The obvious first question to be considered regarding Analytical Thomism is *Quid sit?* The advisory editor, John Haldane, offers the only definition in the volume:

Analytical Thomism is not concerned to appropriate St. Thomas for the advancement of any particular set of doctrines. Equally, it is not a movement of pious exegesis. Instead, it seeks to deploy the methods and ideas of twentieth-century philosophy—of the sort dominant within the English-speaking world—in connection with the broad framework of ideas introduced and developed by Aquinas. *Form, matter, existence, individuation, concepts, mental utterances, good and evil* all get some treatment in the pages that follow.

Each of Haldane's sentences raises some important questions. Right off the bat the negative contrasts make it clear that Analytical Thomism understands itself to be offering some kind of alternative or nontraditional reading of Aquinas; no names are named, but it is clear that Analytical Thomists have some problems with nonanalytical Thomists. First, it is claimed that Analytical Thomism is not committed to "the advancement of any particular set of doctrines." What does this mean? Are the doctrines in question religious or philosophical? How could one possibly identify oneself as a Thomist and not thereby be committed to certain particular doctrines of St. Thomas himself? Are there no basic doctrines ingredient in Thomism of any kind? Second, Analytical Thomism does not involve "pious exegesis." Is this meant to exclude piety and exegesis or just the former? Can there be a Thomism without at least some intellectual piety? Can one be a Thomist without the ability to do textual exegesis informed by a knowledge of medieval philosophy and theology? Third, is Analytical Thomism a methodological approach to Aquinas or is it rather an attempt to reinterpret Aquinas in the light of the leading ideas of analytic philosophy? Fourth, is it enough to be a Thomist that one discuss some interesting central concepts in Aquinas? Haldane does not provide answers to these questions and it is not at all clear that the other contributors to the volume would agree on a common answer.

Hilary Putnam opens the volume with “Thoughts Addressed to an Analytical Thomist.” Putnam acknowledges that he is not an Analytical Thomist because he is outside the Roman Catholic tradition and because he has a different approach to philosophy; the former reason is noteworthy as an example of how Thomism is perceived by some to entail a religious commitment. Putnam’s remarks are offered as friendly questions meant to engage Analytic Thomists in dialogue. Presumably the friendly nature of the queries originates in a common opposition to certain antimetaphysical, antirealist, and antireligious strains in contemporary philosophy.

Putnam’s first set of questions concerns arguments for the existence of God. Putnam rejects the formerly widespread and facile analytic dismissal of the classical proofs as patently invalid, while acknowledging that the premises are questionable because of their metaphysical presuppositions. He argues, however, that the conception of reason embodied in the arguments reflects deep intuitions that have not been refuted by modern science and so need to be taken seriously. But after having defended the traditional project in this way, Putnam goes on to pose a problem that Thomists do need to pay greater attention to: How do these philosophical “proofs,” and the resulting conception of God as at the head of the metaphysical line, connect up with religious belief? Surely for Aquinas such argumentation is not foundational for belief, so how does it relate to belief? A step towards answering this question in a way that takes into account contemporary analytic discussion can be found in Lubor Velecky’s underappreciated *Aquinas’ Five Arguments in the Summa Theologiae 1a 2,3* (Kampen, The Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1994).

The second set of questions posed by Putnam concerns predication with respect to God. Putnam wants to argue that religious language is incommensurable with empirical description and scientific theorizing without, however, getting trapped in language-game compartmentalism, because he believes there is a universal potentiality for religious questioning. What is needed, then, is a way to account for meaningful religious language about God that respects its religious context without thereby sealing it

off compartmentally from all other kinds of discourse. Putnam sees Aquinas's theory of analogical predication as trying to do just that. He is dubious, however, that Aquinas really improves on Maimonides, specifically regarding how a simple God can be meaningfully said to have attributes. I would argue that Putnam does not fully understand Aquinas's doctrine of analogy, but it is more important here to acknowledge how someone sympathetically reading Aquinas from outside the tradition can offer fresh perspectives and raise critical questions. Putnam is surely right, for example, that Thomists need to recognize the way in which "univocal" and "literal" are context-dependent terms that have no simple meaning and that the nonliteral use of religious language cannot be readily explained in terms of a scientific theory.

The next contribution, by Brian Davies, O.P., on "Aquinas, God, and Being," is the most significant in the collection because it bears on the central doctrine of God as *esse per se subsistens* and the degree to which the metaphysics underpinning that claim can be made credible analytically. Davies wants to salvage the analytic respectability of Aquinas's teaching by steering what he takes to be a middle course between traditional views (e.g., Gilsonian) of *esse per se subsistens* as the crown jewel of Thomistic metaphysics on the one hand and the analytic dismissals of the doctrine as either symptomatic of sophistry or evidence of pre-Fregean confusion on the other. Davies' middle course, however, steers quite closely along the analytic bank. He begins by endorsing the Kantian claim that existence is not a predicate in the following sense: to say that ___ exist(s) can never serve to tell us anything about any object or individual (i.e., something that can be named). He offers three arguments in favor of this view. First is a *reductio ad absurdum* claim that to deny his view, to claim that existence does tell us something about something, leads to the conclusion that all positive predications of existence must be true and all negative predications must be false. Second, he argues that the phrase _____ exist(s) is really equivalent to saying that some X are Y; for example, to say that "Some fun-loving Welshmen exist" is equivalent to "Some Welshmen are fun-loving." So just as "some" does not ascribe a property to

something, neither does “exist(s).” Davies’ third argument borrows from Frege and C. J. F. Williams and presumes a parallel between the ascription of existence and the ascription of number. Affirming the existence of something is really nothing other than the denial of the number nought to whatever object or concept is said to exist. Statements of existence are really statements of number, and just as the assertion of number does not ascribe a property to some object, neither does the assertion of existence.

Davies then entertains and dismisses four possible objections to this interpretation of existence in a somewhat cursory and sometimes problematical way, but these objections are not relevant here. The objection that matters most, of course, is that this post-Frege understanding of existence seems *prima facie* far removed from Aquinas’ doctrine of *esse*. The bold, central, and to me utterly incredible claim of Davies, however, is that if we dig a little deeper into what Aquinas says about God as *ipsum esse subsistens* and the source of the *esse* of creatures, we will discover that his understanding of *esse* is quite compatible with the post-Frege understanding of existence! Davies purports to find textual evidence for this reading of *esse* in the opening chapter of the *De ente et essentia*, where he claims that Aquinas holds that “the verb ‘to be’ is used in at least two distinct ways” (509). What is actually in the text, however, is a standard reference to the Aristotelian doctrine of how *ens* (not *esse* or “to be”) is said in two ways: either according to the ten categories or as joining the subject and predicate in a true proposition; in the latter sense even privations can be said “to be” in some sense, as when we say that “blindness is in the eye.” Davies asserts that this distinction is tantamount to a distinction between “sentences which tell us something about a distinct individual and sentences which look or sound as though they were doing this, though in fact they are not” (510). Before considering how Davies construes Aquinas on existence-statements regarding individuals, it is important to note two serious flaws in Davies’ procedure. The first is the failure to attend to the distinction between *esse* and *ens* in Aquinas’s Latin texts; the two terms are not interchangeable, since Aquinas thinks every created being (*ens*) is composed of two distinct principles: *esse*, as the fundamental actuality making the *ens* to be; and

essentia, as a potency for *esse* that formally determines the kind of existence the *ens* exercises. Davies' use of English translations sometimes occludes these important distinctions; as already noted, Davies implies that Aquinas is going to explain "to be" in the sense of existence or *esse* when it is really *ens* that he is talking about. This leads to a second and related difficulty. In his footnote (n. 23 on p. 517) regarding the distinction between the two senses of being, Davies refers to three putatively parallel passages where he claims that Aquinas is making the same distinction: *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, book V, lectio 9; *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 4, ad 2; and *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 48, a. 2, ad 2. The first and third passages concern how *ens* is said in two ways, but the second passage is really about something else. There Aquinas explains how *esse* can be said in two ways: as *actus essendi* or as signifying composition in a proposition. It is the former sense of *esse*, as *actus essendi*, that Davies cannot easily account for and his strategy therefore seems to be to ignore it by citing texts where Aquinas is discussing Aristotle's doctrine of being. It hardly seems fair to Aquinas, however, to explain his doctrine of being in terms of the Aristotelian distinction between the categorical and predicational senses of being.

Davies argues that, for Aquinas, statements about an individual do not tell us that it exists because genuine statements can only be in terms of the categories and being is not a category. Hence if being and existence are interchangeable, and neither is categorical, then statements of existence tell us nothing genuine about an individual. The only genuine ascriptions that we can make about individuals are in terms of the categories and hence in terms of *form*. The ultimate reduction of all genuine predication to form is really at the root of Davies' interpretation of Aquinas. In Davies' own words:

On Aquinas's account, the existence of Thor is reportable by saying what Thor is. "No entity without identity," says W. V. Quine. Or, as Aquinas, puts it, existence is given by form (*forma est essendi principium*). "Every mode of existence," says Aquinas, "is determined by some form" (*quodlibet esse est secundum formam*). For Aquinas, we cannot describe something by saying that, as well as being feline, intelligent and so on, it also exists. To exist is to be or have form. Hence, for instance, Aquinas can only make sense of statements like

“Thor exists” (*Thor est*) on the understanding that they tell us what something is. *Thor est*, said of Thor the cat, means, for Aquinas, “Thor is a cat.” (511)

Davies accords primacy to form or essence as determinative of *esse*; *esse* is just the denial of the number nought with respect to what can be described by form. Although I cannot make a long case here, I believe that Davies misrepresents Thomas’s doctrine of the relationship between *esse* and essence. While it is true that Thomas does speak of form or essence as causing *esse* (*forma dat esse*), Cornelio Fabro and others have taught that such sayings need to be read carefully in the light of the more fundamental doctrine of *esse* as foundational act and form as potency to that act. Form is a real co-principle of being and constitutes every being as a specific kind of being with specific causal powers, but it is related as potency in the transcendental order to the *esse* that it receives from God. Davies’ treatment obscures the differences (1) between the transcendental (God-creature) and the predicamental (creature to creature) orders, (2) between efficient and formal causation, and (3) between concept formation and judgments of existence.

Davies goes on to show how this reading of the essence-*esse* relationship allegedly illuminates Aquinas’s doctrine of God as *esse per se subsistens* and the *causa esse*. To describe creatures as having *esse* is not to attribute a property to them. All that we do when we ascribe *esse* to something is to say that the thing in question is more than the meaning of words, that we are saying what is the case. Davies says that Aquinas’s “idea is that in truly knowing what, for example, a cat (as opposed to a unicorn) is, we are latching on to the fact that cats have *esse*” (514). Davies thus concludes that “Aquinas’s teaching on *esse* is decidedly matter of fact and even pedestrian. For him, we lay hold of the *esse* of things by living in the world and by truly saying what things are” (ibid.). When we ask the question “Why is there any world at all?”, as opposed to what accounts for this or that particular thing, we get to God who, as *ipsum esse subsistens*, explains how creatures are more than the meaning of words. To say that God is *ipsum esse subsistens* is ultimately just a shorthand way of saying that God is not created because God is not composed; it is

an exercise in the *via negativa*. Whatever accounts for particular beings must somehow transcend those beings.

Davies concludes his essay:

I have tried to expound Aquinas's teaching so as to indicate that, if nothing else, it is something of which a modern philosopher might well take account since it accords with what a modern philosopher might well want to say on the topic of existence. I am tempted to say that it is something of which a modern *analytical* philosopher might take account; but I cannot really claim to know what makes a philosopher analytic. (517)

In these words surfaces the major problem facing the entire Analytical Thomist project: the tendency to domesticate Aquinas metaphysically so that he fits neatly into analytic categories. Without referring explicitly to Davies, Stephen Theron nonetheless aptly characterizes the import of an approach like Davies' in the concluding essay: "What emerges, after all, is a view of the medieval colossus as not out of harmony with the later, supposedly more sophisticated researches of Frege and the tradition in which Frege stands, at the same time as Frege himself can by this route more easily appear as the continuator of an original *philosophia perennis*" (614). To use the language of Gilson, Frege-friendly readings of Aquinas end up as some form of essentialism. Aquinas's authentic doctrine of being—with its emphasis on *esse* as the *actus essendi*, the act of all acts and the perfection of all perfections—simply cannot be harmonized with post-Frege analytical dogmas. It is rather the case that Aquinas challenges those dogmas. What is really called for in Analytical Thomism is a thoughtful and critical confrontation with prevailing analytic dogmas on existence as in David Braine's *The Reality of Time and the Existence of God* (Oxford, 1988). Any version of Analytic Thomism that gives up defending the uniqueness and richness of Aquinas's decidedly pre-Frege notion of *esse* has given up the game. The best of the essays in this volume, and the model for the kind of Analytical Thomism that would be salutary, demonstrate not how Aquinas fits neatly onto the analytic map, but rather how he does not.

John Lamont's "Aquinas on Divine Simplicity" begins with an interesting discussion of form. He argues that we can make good

sense of Aquinas on the distinction between form in *esse naturale* and form in *esse intentionale* through Frege's distinction between *Eigenschaft* (property) and *Merkmal* (characteristic). The form as thought (*esse intentionale*) is the same as the form in the material object (*esse materiale*); there is no difference in the characteristics of the form, but rather the form as thought takes on a property. Lamont argues that Aquinas's doctrine of form is superior to Frege's doctrine of concepts because Aquinas does not have to account for abstract objects. Lamont rightfully stresses, in the face of persistent misunderstanding, that the form as thought for Aquinas is not a mental image; knowing involves formal identity, not a representational matching of image and original. Overall Lamont's discussion of form is intriguing, yet it is flawed by his failure to respect Aquinas's distinction between form and essence.

Lamont goes on to apply this account of form to the question of divine simplicity, but it turns out that his main interest is what divine simplicity implies for divine necessity. The *crux interpretatum* is whether God's existence is necessary in a logical sense. Brian Davies and Patterson Brown want to argue that necessary existence can be attributed to God (as in the *tertia via*) without that entailing a commitment to the thesis that "God exists" is logically necessary. But as Lamont shows, Aquinas argues that the identity of essence and *esse* in God does entail that "God exists" is logically necessary, only we cannot see this because the divine essence is beyond our grasp; it is true *per se*, but not *quoad nos*. Lamont asserts that Brown and Davies' denial of this claim is rooted in their underlying adherence to Frege (and Geach). According to this view, "God exists" cannot be logically necessary because existence is a property of concepts, an assertion that there is an object answering to the concept. Since existence is not a property of objects, it cannot be a logically necessary property of God. As we have already seen, Fregean metaphysical commitments skew the interpretation of Aquinas. Lamont argues that there is a modified Fregean way of understanding how existence can be a necessary to God if we see being actual as a unique characteristic mark (*Merkmal*) of God rather than as a normal property (*Eigenschaft*).

Aquinas's notion of form is central also to Jonathan Jacobs and John Zeis's "Form and Cognition: How to Go Out of Your Mind." While it is unfortunate that Jacobs and Zeis lump Aristotle and Aquinas together in what they describe as an "Aristotelian-Thomistic" approach to cognition, they rightly stress the centrality of formal causation in both cases. It is formal causation that obviates the modern problem of how the mind gets back to the world. Jacobs and Zeis point out that Aquinas's doctrine of abstraction is radically different from post-Lockean doctrines. It is not a matter of empiricist abstraction wherein the input is a set of particular ideas and the output is some kind of general image or idea. The authors argue that the doctrine of formal causation, and so formal identity in knowing, that is ingredient in Aquinas's notion of concept formation allows Aquinas to avoid the skeptical problems endemic to modern doctrines of abstraction as typified in Hume, Putnam, Quine, and Kripke. Jacobs and Zeis then discuss how to place Aquinas's doctrine of cognition on the contemporary epistemological map. They argue that it is primarily externalist, non-evidentialist, and natural, but that it also incorporates elements of foundationalist, coherence, internalist, and normative theories of cognition. This leads to the simple but important conclusion: "The standard dichotomies in the contemporary discussion of the justification of belief do not apply to the A/T [Aristotelian-Thomistic] theory of knowledge" (553). Contrary to Davies, who interprets Aquinas as confirming contemporary presuppositions, Jacobs and Zeis find him challenging them.

Eleonore Stump comes to rather the same conclusion in her "Aquinas's Account of Freedom: Intellect and Will." Stump wants to argue that Aquinas's view of freedom is not voluntaristic because he associates freedom not with the will alone, but rather with will *and* intellect: "the dynamic interactions of intellect and will yield freedom as an emergent property or systems-level feature" (576). This aspect of Aquinas's account is often obscured by a narrow focus on *liberum arbitrium* that neglects the complex interplay of intellect and will in the various other moments of a human act. While I think Stump's aversion to voluntarism inclines her too far in the opposite direction of intellectualism, she

nonetheless does an excellent job of highlighting how both freedom of action and freedom of will are systems-level properties.

Stump argues that Aquinas is not a compatibilist because he believes the causal chain resulting in a voluntary act has to originate in principles intrinsic to the agent. She holds that “if something extrinsic to the agent were to act on the will with efficient causation, then the tie of the will to the intellect, from which acts of the will get their voluntary character, would be broken, and so the act of the will wouldn’t be voluntary” (585). This is a debatable claim, however, given what Aquinas holds about the relationship between God and the will. Stump considers the God-will problem to be restricted to theology’s consideration of grace, but it is clear from many passages in Aquinas that God is operative in the will quite apart from grace. This would imply that while Aquinas is surely not a compatibilist in the normal sense of the term, he does think that human freedom is compatible with divine causation. Aquinas does not fit neatly into either compatibilism or incompatibilism. As for the other contemporary category, libertarianism, if it is understood to entail the principle of alternative possibilities or the freedom to do otherwise, then Aquinas does not really fit here either. As Stump shows, Aquinas does hold that *liberum arbitrium* entails the ability to do otherwise, but ultimately that freedom is rooted in a freedom that does not involve the will’s ability to do otherwise. We are not free with respect to alternative possibilities when it comes to the will’s natural inclination to the *bonum commune* or ultimate end. When confronted with God the ultimate Good, the will cannot nill; the blessed in heaven freely will God, but they cannot do otherwise. Stump argues that what really matters then for freedom is not the presence or absence of alternative possibilities, but rather that the agent’s volition causally originate internally from his own intellect and will. Stump therefore concludes that Aquinas does not fit neatly into any preexisting libertarian mold. Ultimately the will is free in Aquinas not because of its independence from intellect, but rather precisely because of its relationship to intellect.

The title of Stephen Theron's concluding essay reveals a negative verdict on the project of Analytical Thomism: "The Resistance of Thomism to Analytical and Other Patronage." Theron considers Analytical Thomism as a capitulation to the *Zeitgeist* that is incompatible with Thomism's claim to be a *philosophia perrennis*. He roundly and harshly condemns a long list of analytic *corruptores*. Theron seems to think that one cannot be a Thomist without abandoning analytic philosophy altogether. While I am sympathetic to some of Theron's worries, I do not share his deep pessimism about Analytic Thomism. Thomists not trained in analytic philosophy can learn much from analytical readers of Aquinas. Analytic Thomists can help non-Analytic Thomists to see new themes in Aquinas, to pose new questions to him, to push his thought in new directions, to acknowledge areas where his thinking is no longer tenable, and so bring his thought into the contemporary arena. The logical and argumentative rigor of the best of analytic philosophy can indeed be a necessary corrective to overly pious expository readings of Aquinas; St. Thomas himself can stand such scrutiny, even if some of his followers cannot.

The influence needs to go in both directions, however, because one of the principal flaws in many analytic readings of Aquinas is an astonishing unfamiliarity with nonanalytic treatments. One often has the impression that Analytic Thomists are writing only for each other, oblivious to the fact that many of their points have already been made by nonanalytic scholars; they often merely reinvent the Thomistic wheel. They need to read more non-English, nonanalytic literature. They need to become more historically informed. They need a greater familiarity with Aquinas's larger theological picture. Analytic and non-Analytic Thomists have much to teach each other if only they would listen. Together they would have much to offer current analytical philosophy by offering a way of thinking that transcends the standard problematic by challenging the dogmas and idols of the age.

There is cause for optimism then about the stimulus to Thomism that could come from Analytical Thomism. As noted in this discussion, however, the major cause for concern is

metaphysical. At the heart of Aquinas's philosophy is his understanding of being as ultimately rooted in *esse* as *actus essendi*. This does not fit with analytical metaphysical dogmas. Here then is where the ultimate test of allegiance lies. It is possible, of course, to be an analytic philosopher who offers interesting readings of Aquinas without any commitment to his doctrine of being. But I would not call such a one a Thomist, nor, I presume, would he call himself one. What I am arguing is that to be a Thomist of any stripe requires some primary commitment to Thomas's metaphysics; without that commitment, one may be an interpreter or even a specialist, but one is not a Thomist. It is a matter of debate, of course, what other doctrines of St. Thomas one must adhere to in order to be a Thomist and surely the items are broader than the metaphysics of *esse*. But however one draws the Thomistic circle, the core must be *esse* in St. Thomas's sense, not Frege's.