

AQUINAS

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CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xv
<i>List of Aquinas's works</i>	xvi
Introduction: life and overview of Aquinas's thought	1
Part I	
The ultimate foundation of reality	33
1 Metaphysics: a theory of things	35
2 Goodness	61
3 God's simplicity	92
4 God's eternity	131
5 God's knowledge	159
Part II	
The nature of human beings	189
6 Forms and bodies: the soul	191
7 The foundations of knowledge	217
8 The mechanisms of cognition	244
9 Freedom: action, intellect and will	277

CONTENTS

Part III	
The nature of human excellence	307
10 A representative moral virtue: justice	309
11 A representative intellectual virtue: wisdom	339
12 A representative theological virtue: faith	361
13 Grace and free will	389
Part IV	
God's relationship to human beings	405
14 The metaphysics of the incarnation	407
15 Atonement	427
16 Providence and suffering	455
<i>Notes</i>	479
<i>Select bibliography</i>	581
<i>Index</i>	598

PREFACE

There are some books which only a young and inexperienced scholar would undertake to write but which only a senior scholar who knows enough to shrink from the task might conceivably be able to write. This is one of those books. Its explicit purpose is to explicate the views of Aquinas with some historical accuracy and to bring them into dialogue with the corresponding discussions in contemporary philosophy. On the face of it, of course, this sort of twinned investigation should be the aim of any philosophical study of the texts of a thinker from some previous age. If such a study is not carried out with historical accuracy, the result may be philosophically interesting, but it will not count as a study of the thought of that historical figure. On the other hand, if the views of preceding periods are presented in such a way that they make no contribution to current philosophical discussion, then the historical views are preserved only as museum specimens, and not as living interlocutors still able to influence philosophical thought. The explicit aim of this book is therefore a good one. The problem comes in the attempt to execute it. Aquinas wrote on a very broad range of issues, in highly technical and sophisticated ways, so that understanding and presenting his thought is a daunting undertaking. Connecting it with related discussions in contemporary philosophy is a Herculean task.

In one way or another, I have been engaged in this task for more years than I care to acknowledge. In the process, I have learned a great deal, including lessons about the need for compromise. The compromise is what some readers may notice first.

Readers familiar with Aquinas will find that some part of Aquinas's thought – or, perhaps more offensively, some standard explication of it – which strikes them as particularly important is not represented in this book at all. The list of things I have left out of this book is at least as long as its table of contents. So, to take just one of many things which could be given as an example, I have said virtually nothing about the relationship of Aquinas's views to the views of preceding thinkers, either those in the ancient Greek and Hellenistic world or those in the earlier Latin-speaking medieval period or about the way in which Aquinas's thought was influenced by the

PREFACE

Islamic and Jewish philosophy and theology of his own milieu. With very few exceptions, I have also not discussed the development of his thought from his early works to his mature writings. And I have only briefly touched on or omitted completely certain topics frequently discussed in general studies of Aquinas's thought, including, for example, the relation of philosophy to theology, the distinction between essence and existence, the metaphysical notion of participation, real relations between God and creatures, and many others. My reason for not treating these issues and topics is that it is not possible to do everything in one volume, even a fat volume, and that the things I have omitted are regularly discussed in standard reference works on Aquinas. At any rate, it is abundantly clear that some compromise is necessary between the ideal plan of presenting all of Aquinas's thought and any practicable plan for one book. I have tried to pick those issues and topics that allow a reader to see Aquinas's whole worldview in broad outline and to appropriate in particular some of its richest and most powerful parts.

On the other hand, but still on the same point, readers coming to this volume from contemporary philosophy may find that in many places where they might have wanted or expected a bridge between Aquinas's thought and contemporary philosophy, Aquinas's thought is presented alone, without reference to current work in the field. Here, too, compromise has been necessary if the volume was to be kept within any reasonable bounds. In effect, I concentrated bridge-building efforts on those topics where, by the vagaries of academic interests and trends, there is some special confluence of Aquinas's views and current philosophical debate, so that either Aquinas's thought is particularly illuminated by something in the contemporary discussion or has something particularly interesting to contribute to it. But even within these constraints, I have had, in the end, to leave unexplored topics that might have been profitably pursued, including, for example, the nature of causation, the role of final causes in explanation, the notion of truth, the notion of beauty, human emotions, divine impassibility, the persons of the Trinity, and many others. The bridge-building of this volume is thus only a contribution to an on-going process, which requires many scholars with various skills and interests, of handing on Aquinas's thought in all its richness and power.

Some readers may also wonder at the way in which the subjects are grouped in the table of contents, which is not simply a list of the main areas in contemporary philosophy, such as metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, and so on, and at the mix of theology and philosophy in this volume. It would be possible to extract, for example, Aquinas's metaphysics or epistemology from various parts of his work and present his thought in a form more familiar to contemporary philosophy. But Aquinas himself does not present his views in this form in his systematic treatments. After experimenting with different approaches, I have decided that there is merit in following *roughly* Aquinas's categorization and ordering, and thus the order

PREFACE

of the table of contents for this volume largely (but not entirely) reflects the order of Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*. At any rate, it seemed to me in the end that Aquinas's own view of the world emerges more clearly in this way, and the mix of what we now would clearly count as philosophy with theology is unquestionably representative of his own mode of writing. And, clearly, no bridge-building between his thought and contemporary philosophy is possible without beginning with *his* thought; his voice is not brought into current debate if it is not *his* voice which is being heard. On the other hand, readers interested in knowing Aquinas's positions primarily as they relate to some area of contemporary philosophy will have no trouble finding them even with this arrangement. His epistemology, for example, can be found in Chapters 7 and 8, on the nature of human knowledge and the mechanisms of human cognition.

The one regret I have with my decision to arrange the material in this way is that some readers who begin at the beginning and read through from there will perhaps never get past the opening chapters, where some of the densest and most technical discussion occurs. I encourage readers who might get bogged down in the section on the ultimate foundation of reality to read the chapters in any order that interests them. Although there is certainly something that is lost if the chapters are not read in order, I have nonetheless tried to make it possible to read each chapter on its own; and there are ample cross-references to show a reader who reads in this way where he or she might profitably turn to other chapters for further discussion of the same issues.

A word of explanation is also in order as regards secondary literature. The secondary literature on Aquinas is vast and of uneven quality; an attempt to canvass and evaluate all of it would be bulky and often tedious to one or another group of readers in the audience at which this book is aimed. In the time I was working on this book, I read and profited from much of this literature, but in the book itself, I have cited and discussed only those secondary sources that make a direct and immediate contribution of an especially valuable sort to a particular subject as I discuss it in a given chapter. The bibliography of the book reflects this practice, and so many helpful, interesting secondary sources on Aquinas's thought are omitted from the bibliography; this book is intended as a philosophical study of Aquinas, rather than as a textbook survey of his thought. In addition to the standard Thomistic bibliographies, readers interested in a reference bibliography, or in a survey approach to Aquinas's work, can find it, for example, in *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), edited by Norman Kretzmann and me. Finally, in the time in which I was doing what I firmly intended to be the last revisions on this manuscript, some excellent new books on Aquinas appeared, and some others were delivered to their publishers; they will undoubtedly be in print before this book is. If I had stopped to digest those books and to include comments on them here,

the last revisions would have been delayed even longer; and so, although I look forward to learning from and commenting on that newly appeared literature, I have not engaged it here.

Acknowledgements

Then there is the matter of acknowledgements. In the course of writing this book, I have accumulated a great number of debts to people whose help – of one kind or another – has contributed to bringing this book to fruition and has made it better than it would otherwise have been.

The most important acknowledgement and the one needing the most explanation is my debt to Norman Kretzmann. When I was originally approached about writing this book, I agreed to undertake it only if Norman would write it with me, and he and the Press both agreed to my request. Norman and I realized that this book would be a long, slow project, and we planned some of our joint papers as preparation for it. In the event, however, Norman became ill with what he knew was a terminal disease; and we decided together that his remaining energies ought to go into trying to finish the projected three-volume study of Aquinas's *Summa contra gentiles* which he had in progress. As it was, I am sad to say, he succeeded in finishing only two of those volumes: *The Metaphysics of Theism* (Oxford University Press, 1997) and *The Metaphysics of Creation* (Oxford University Press, 1999). (What work he did do on the third volume has also been published, in a special issue of *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* edited by my friend Scott MacDonald, who sorrowed with me at Norman's death.)

Nonetheless, the joint work Norman and I did in preparation for this book is reflected here. In addition to an overview of Aquinas's life and work, we wrote together three papers on divine eternity, and one each on God's knowledge, God's goodness and God's simplicity. All of that work is ancestral to the chapters on those topics in this book. One piece – our introduction to Aquinas's life and work – is reproduced here with only small changes, but I have reworked extensively all the rest of our joint articles. The chapter on divine simplicity is the most radically altered. Our original attempt to defend Aquinas's account of divine simplicity, I now see, was seriously incomplete; and although I do not suppose that even now I am able to give a complete and successful exposition and defense of this part of Aquinas's thought, I do think I can take the defense a significant step further than Norman and I were originally able to do.

In addition to the chapters which bear some greater or lesser resemblance to the papers we did together, all the rest of this book reflects Norman's thought as well. He was my teacher, mentor and friend; and his extensive, helpful, critical comments on all my work have informed the thought underlying every part of this book. Or, what is more nearly true to say, over our many years of working together, my way of thinking about things became so entangled with

PREFACE

his that it is not possible to make a sharp division between what is mine and what is his. I have no words to express what a loss his death was for me.

I should perhaps add here that, in addition to the papers jointly authored by Norman and me, other papers of mine (listed in the bibliography) are the ancestors of many of the chapters in this book. All of these papers are revised, most of them heavily. In some cases, such as the chapter on faith, the revisions are drastic enough to make the connection to the earlier paper hard to recognize.

I also need to acknowledge the help of many other scholars and philosophers. The following people gave me helpful comments on larger or smaller parts of the manuscript or on a paper that was a precursor to a chapter in it: Marilyn Adams, Robert Adams, William Alston, William Anglin, Richard Bernstein, James Bohman, David Burrell, Terry Christlieb, Bowman Clarke, Norris Clarke, Richard Creel, Richard Cross, Fred Crosson, Brian Davies, Stephen Davis, Lawrence Dewan, Therese Druart, Ronald Feenstra, Fred Feldman, Thomas Flint, Shawn Floyd, Harry Frankfurt, Leon Galis, John Greco, William Hasker, Joshua Hoffman, Al Howsepian, Christopher Hughes, James Keller, James Klagge, Brian Leftow, David Lewis, Howard Louthan, Scott MacDonald, Steven Maitzen, William Mann, George Mavrodes, Deborah Mayo, Ralph McInerny, Alan McMichael, Ernan McMullin, Harlan Miller, Gerald O'Collins, Timothy O'Connor, Robert Pasnau, Derk Pereboom, Alvin Plantinga, Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., Chris Pliatska, Philip Quinn, Gary Rosenkrantz, James Ross, Michael Rota, William Rowe, Joseph Runzo, Bruce Russell, Brian Shanley, Christopher Shields, Sydney Shoemaker, Richard Sorabji, Robert Stalnaker, James Stone, Nicholas Sturgeon, Richard Swinburne, Charles Taliaferro, Kevin Timpe, Thomas Tracy, John van Engen, Bas van Fraassen, Peter van Inwagen, Theodore Vitali, Edward Wierenga, John Wippel, Nicholas Wolterstorff. At the stage at which I was preparing to enjoy the relief of sending the manuscript off in the post, Jim Stone gave me extensive and helpful comments on virtually all of it; I owe him a great debt for this labor of his, which has made the final product more careful and polished than it otherwise would have been. The final stage of the revisions has also profited significantly from the labors of my two exemplary research assistants, Chris Pliatska and Kevin Timpe, who ferreted out and fixed many, but no doubt not all, of the instances of sloppiness that tend, miserably enough, to creep into a work of this size.

I also need to acknowledge the superb facilities and pleasant personnel of the National Humanities Center, where some of the work for this book was done. I am grateful as well to the Religion Program of the Pew Charitable Trusts for a year of leave, during which I made considerable progress on the manuscript. I also want to express my heartfelt thanks to Father Michael McGarry, C.S.P., and the Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem, of which Father McGarry is Rector. The sad events in the Middle East notwithstanding, Tantur is one of the best places for contemplative academic work.

PREFACE

The beauty of the Institute and its location, the excellence of its library, and the dedicated commitment of the staff and Rector of Tantur make it wonderful to work there; I remember with gratitude my weeks at Tantur working on this book.

Finally, I need to express gratitude of a more personal sort. The period in which I finished this manuscript was marked for me by a firestorm of grief, and I owe more than I can say, certainly in any conventional form, to Father Theodore Vitali, C.P., whose wise counsel and great-hearted willingness to suffer with me walked me through the storm. The Jesuit and Dominican communities at Saint Louis University have also been an unparalleled blessing to me in this time. Married female Protestant that I am, I have found in those communities deeply comforting company for the road. The Dominican Prior has pronounced me the world's most improbable Thomist and with exemplary patience has welcomed me into his fold. The Jesuits I am grateful to call my friends have made 'consolation' a word in my working vocabulary.

I also owe a great debt of gratitude to my husband Donald. In over thirty years of marriage, he has gone with me through all the battles that come with starting out poor, overworked and off-balance (in the way only the tumults of child-raising can produce), and yet trying to do one's best anyway for those whom one loves. If the world gave medals for such things, he would be the world's most decorated veteran. And finally I am grateful to my children, whom I have loved to distraction all the years this book was in progress. Loving them and wishing fervently for their flourishing has given me whatever insight I possess into the idea of the mothering love of God that animates Aquinas's whole worldview. This book is dedicated to them.

INTRODUCTION

Life and overview of Aquinas's thought

Introduction

Thomas Aquinas (1224/6–1274) lived an active, demanding academic and ecclesiastical life that ended while he was still in his forties. He nonetheless produced many works, varying in length from a few pages to a few volumes. Because his writings grew out of his activities as a teacher in the Dominican order and a member of the theology faculty of the University of Paris, most are concerned with what he and his contemporaries thought of as theology. However, much of academic theology in the Middle Ages consisted in a rational investigation of the most fundamental aspects of reality in general and of human nature and behavior in particular. That vast domain obviously includes much of what is now considered to be philosophy, and is reflected in the broad subject matter of Aquinas's theological writings.

The scope and philosophical character of medieval theology as practised by Aquinas can easily be seen in his two most important works, *Summa contra gentiles* (SCG) (*Synopsis [of Christian Doctrine] Directed Against Unbelievers*) and *Summa theologiae* (ST) (*Synopsis of Theology*). However, many of the hundreds of topics covered in those two large works are also investigated in more detail in the smaller works resulting from Aquinas's numerous academic disputations (something like a cross between formal debates and twentieth-century graduate seminars), which he conducted in his various academic posts. Some of those topics are taken up differently again in his commentaries on books of the Bible and/or works by Aristotle and other authors. Although Aquinas is remarkably consistent in his several discussions of the same topic, it is often helpful to examine parallel passages in his writings when fully assessing his views on any issue.

Aquinas's most obvious philosophical connection is with Aristotle. Besides producing commentaries on Aristotle's works, he often cites Aristotle in support of a thesis he is defending, even when commenting on Scripture. There are also, in Aquinas's writings, many implicit Aristotelian elements, which he had thoroughly absorbed into his own thought. As a convinced Aristotelian, he often adopts Aristotle's critical attitude towards

theories associated with Plato, especially the account of ordinary substantial forms as separately existing entities. However, although Aquinas, like other medieval scholars of western Europe, had almost no access to Plato's works, he was influenced by the writings of Augustine and the pseudo-Dionysius. Through them he absorbed a good deal of Platonism as well; more than he was in a position to recognize as such.

On the other hand, Aquinas is the paradigmatic Christian philosopher–theologian, fully aware of his intellectual debt to religious doctrine. He was convinced, however, that Christian thinkers should be ready to dispute rationally on any topic, especially theological issues, not only among themselves but also with non-Christians of all sorts. Since, in his view, Jews accept the Old Testament and heretics the New Testament, he thought Christians could argue some issues with both groups on the basis of commonly accepted religious authority. However, because other non-Christians,

for instance, Mohammedans and pagans – do not agree with us about the authority of any scripture on the basis of which they can be convinced ... it is necessary to have recourse to natural reason, to which everyone is compelled to assent – although where theological issues are concerned it cannot do the whole job¹

(since some of the data of theology are initially accessible only in Scripture). Moreover, Aquinas differed from most of his thirteenth-century Christian colleagues in the breadth and depth of his respect for Islamic and Jewish philosopher–theologians, especially Avicenna and Maimonides. He saw them as valued co-workers in the vast project of philosophical theology, clarifying and supporting religious doctrine by philosophical analysis and argumentation. His own commitment to that project involved him in contributing to almost all the areas of philosophy recognized since antiquity, omitting only natural philosophy (the precursor of natural science).

A line of thought with such strong connections to powerful antecedents might have resulted in no more than a pious amalgam. However, Aquinas's philosophy avoids eclecticism because of his own innovative approach to organizing and reasoning about all the topics included under the overarching medieval conception of philosophical Christian theology, and because of his special talents for systematic synthesis and for identifying and skillfully defending, on almost every issue he considers, the most sensible available position.

Early years

Thomas Aquinas was born at Roccasecca, near Naples, the youngest son of a large Italian aristocratic family. As is generally true of even prominent

INTRODUCTION

medieval people, it is hard to determine exactly when he was born; plausible arguments have been offered for 1224, 1225 and 1226. He began his schooling in the great Benedictine abbey at Monte Cassino (1231–9), and from 1239–44 he was a student at the University of Naples. In 1244 he joined the Dominican friars, a relatively new religious order devoted to study and preaching; by doing so he antagonized his family, who seem to have been counting on his becoming abbot of Monte Cassino. When the Dominicans ordered Aquinas to go to Paris for further study, his family had him abducted en route and brought home, where he was kept for almost two years. Near the end of that time, his brothers hired a prostitute to try to seduce him, but Aquinas angrily chased her from his room. Having impressed his family with his high-minded determination, in 1245 Aquinas was allowed to return to the Dominicans, who again sent him to Paris, this time successfully.

At the University of Paris, Aquinas first encountered Albert the Great, who quickly became his most influential teacher and eventually his friend and mentor. When Albert moved on to the University of Cologne in 1248, Aquinas followed him there, having declined Pope Innocent IV's extraordinary offer to appoint him abbot of Monte Cassino while allowing him to remain a Dominican.

Aquinas seems to have been unusually large and extremely modest and quiet. When during his four years at Cologne, his special gifts began to be apparent, despite his reticence and humility, Albert assigned the still-reluctant Aquinas his first active part in an academic disputation. Having failed in his efforts to shake his best student's arguments on this occasion, Albert declared, "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."

In 1252 Aquinas returned to Paris for the course of study leading to the degree of master in theology, roughly the equivalent of a twentieth-century PhD. During the first academic year, he studied and lectured on the Bible; the final three years were devoted to commenting on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, a standard requirement for the degree at that time. Produced in 1253–6, Aquinas's massive commentary (often referred to as the *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum* (*Commentary on the Sentences*)) is the first of his four theological syntheses (*SCG*, *ST*, and the *Compendium theologiae* being the others). It contains much valuable material, but because it is superseded in many respects by his great *Summa contra gentiles* and *Summa theologiae* the *Scriptum* has not yet been studied as much as it should be.

During that same four-year period, Aquinas produced *De ente et essentia* (*On Being and Essence*), a short philosophical treatise written for his fellow Dominicans at Paris. Although it is indebted to Avicenna's *Metaphysics*, *De ente* is distinctively Aquinas's own, expounding many of the concepts and theses that remained fundamental to his thought throughout his career.

First Paris regency

In the spring of 1256, Aquinas was appointed regent master in theology at Paris, a position he held until the end of the academic year 1258–9. *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* (QDV) (*Disputed Questions on Truth*) is the first of his sets of disputed questions and the most important work he produced during those three years. It grew out of his professorship, which obliged him to conduct several formal public disputations each year. QDV consists of twenty-nine widely ranging Questions, each devoted to some general topic such as conscience, God’s knowledge, faith, goodness, free will, human emotions and truth (the first Question, from which the treatise gets its name). Each Question is divided into several Articles, and the 253 articles are the work’s topically specific units: for example, q. 1, a. 9 is “Is there truth in the senses [*in sensu*]?”

The elaborate structure of each of those articles, like much of Aquinas’s writing, reflects the “scholastic method”, which, like medieval disputations in the classroom, had its ultimate source in Aristotle’s recommendations in his *Topics* regarding dialectical inquiry. Aquinas’s philosophical discussions in that form typically begin with a yes/no question. Each article then develops as a kind of debate. It begins with arguments for an answer opposed to Aquinas’s own position; these arguments are commonly, if somewhat misleadingly, called ‘objections’. Next come the arguments *sed contra* (but, on the other hand); in later works, these arguments are often reduced to a single citation of some generally accepted authority that Aquinas construes as on his side of the issue. The *sed contra* is followed by Aquinas’s reasoned presentation and defense of his own position. This is the master’s “determination” of the question, called the ‘*corpus*’ or ‘body’ of the article. An article normally concludes with Aquinas’s rejoinders to each of the objections (indicated by ‘ad 1’, and so on, in references).

Conducting “disputed questions” was one of the duties of a regent master in theology, but the theology faculty also provided regular opportunities for “quodlibetal questions”, occasions on which a master could, if he wished, undertake to provide replies to any and all questions proposed by members of the academic audience. These occasions were scheduled, for the master’s own good, during the two penitential seasons of the church year. Aquinas seems to have accepted this challenge on at least five of the six such occasions occurring during his first regency at Paris, producing *Quaestiones quodlibetales* (*Quodlibetal Questions*) in which he offers his considered judgment on issues ranging from whether the soul is to be identified with its powers to whether the damned behold the saints in glory.

Aquinas’s commentaries on Boethius’s *De trinitate* (*On the Trinity*) and *De hebdomadibus* (sometimes referred to as ‘*How Substances are Good*’) are his other philosophically important writings from this period of his first regency. Although several philosophers had commented on those Boethian treatises in the twelfth century, the subsequent influx of Aristotelian works had left them

almost universally disregarded by the time Aquinas wrote his commentaries. No one knows for certain why or for whom Aquinas wrote them, but he might well have undertaken these studies for his own edification on topics that were then becoming important to his thought.

The *De trinitate* commentary (*Expositio super librum Boethii De trinitate*) presents Aquinas's views on the relationship of faith and reason and on the methods and inter-relations of all the recognized bodies of organized knowledge, or "sciences". Boethius's *De hebdomadibus* is the *locus classicus* for the medieval consideration of the relation between being and goodness. Dealing with this topic in his commentary on that treatise, Aquinas also produced his first systematic account of metaphysical participation, one of the important Platonist elements in his thought. Participation, he claims, obtains when the metaphysical composition of something A includes some X as one of A's metaphysical components, when X also belongs to something else B that is X in its own right and when X's belonging to B in this way is presupposed by A's having X. For example, an effect participates in its cause in this way, on Aquinas's view, and creatures participate in various ways in their Creator.

Naples and Orvieto: *Summa contra gentiles* and biblical commentary

Aquinas's activities between 1259 and 1265 are not well documented, but he seems definitely to have left his professorship at Paris at the end of the academic year 1258–9. He probably spent the next two years at a Dominican priory in Naples, working on the *Summa contra gentiles*, which he had begun in Paris and which he subsequently finished in Orvieto where, as lector, he was in charge of studies at the Dominican priory until 1265.

Summa contra gentiles is unlike Aquinas's three other theological syntheses in more than one respect. Stylistically, it is unlike the earlier *Scriptum* and the later *Summa theologiae* in not following the scholastic method; instead, it is written in ordinary prose divided into chapters, like his *Compendium theologiae* (*Compendium of Theology*) which he seems to have written immediately afterwards (1265–7). More importantly, the *Scriptum*, *Summa theologiae* and the *Compendium* are all contributions to revealed theology, which essentially includes the data of revelation among the starting points of its theorizing. In *Summa contra gentiles*, on the other hand, Aquinas postpones revealed theology to the last (fourth) book, in which he deals with the "mysteries", the few doctrinal propositions that, on his view, cannot be arrived at by natural reason alone and that have their sources in revelation only; and he takes these up with the aim of showing that even those propositions "are not opposed to natural reason".² He devotes the first three books of *SCG* to fully developing a natural theology, dependent on natural reason and independent of revelation. As developed in Books I–III of *SCG*, this natural theology is

INTRODUCTION

able to accomplish a very large part of theology's job, from establishing the existence of God through working out details of human morality.

Discussions important for understanding Aquinas's positions in many areas of philosophy are also scattered, not always predictably, among interpretations of the text in his biblical commentaries. During Aquinas's stay in Orvieto and around the time he was writing Book III of *Summa contra gentiles*, on providence and God's relations with human beings, he also produced his *Expositio super Iob ad litteram* (*Literal Commentary on Job*), one of the most fully developed and philosophical of his biblical commentaries, rivaled in those respects only by his later commentary on Romans. The body of the Book of Job consists mainly of the speeches of Job and his "comforters". Aquinas sees those speeches as constituting a genuine debate, almost a medieval academic disputation (determined in the end by God himself), in which the thought develops subtly, advanced by arguments. His construal of the argumentation is ingenious, the more so because twentieth-century readers have tended to devalue the speeches as tedious reiterations of misconceived accusations countered by Job's slight variations on the theme of his innocence.

Aquinas's focus is also at variance with the modern view, which supposes the book to cast doubts on God's goodness (and so to cast doubts on the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God) insofar as it presents the problem of evil, raised by the horrible suffering of an innocent person. Aquinas's main interest in the book is in its implications for the doctrine of providence. As Aquinas interprets it, the book explains the nature and operations of divine providence, which he understands as compatible with permitting bad things to happen to good people. As Aquinas sees it:

If in this life people are rewarded by God for good deeds and punished for bad, as Eliphaz [one of the comforters] was trying to establish, it apparently follows that the ultimate goal for human beings is in this life. But Job means to rebut this opinion, and he wants to show that the present life of human beings does not contain the ultimate goal, but is related to it as motion is related to rest, and a road to its destination.³

The things that happen to a person in this life can be explained in terms of divine providence only by reference to the possibility of that person's achieving the ultimate goal of perfect happiness; the enjoyment of union with God in the afterlife.

In discussing Job's lament that God does not hear his prayers, Aquinas says that Job has that impression because God sometimes

attends not to a person's pleas but rather to his advantage. A doctor does not attend to the pleas of the invalid who asks that the bitter

medicine be taken away (supposing that the doctor doesn't take it away because he knows that it contributes to health). Instead, the doctor attends to the patient's advantage; for by doing so he produces health, which the sick person wants most of all.⁴

In the same way, God sometimes permits a person to suffer despite prayers for deliverance, because God knows that those sufferings are helping that person achieve what he wants most of all.

Rome: disputed questions, Dionysius and the *Compendium*

In 1265 Aquinas went from Orvieto to Rome, having been appointed to establish a Dominican studium and to serve as regent master there. This Roman period of his career, which lasted until 1268, was particularly productive. Some of his major works dating from 1265–8 are just what would have been expected of a regent master in theology, in particular, three sets of disputed questions, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia* (*Disputed Questions on {God's} Power*), *Quaestio disputata de anima* (*Disputed Question on the Soul*) and *Quaestio disputata de spiritualibus creaturis* (*Disputed Question on Spiritual Creatures*). In the earliest of these, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, there are eighty-three Articles grouped under ten Questions; the first six questions are on divine power, while the final four are on problems associated with combining the doctrine of Trinity with God's absolute simplicity. The much shorter *De anima* is concerned mainly with metaphysical aspects of the soul, concluding with some special problems associated with the nature and capacities of souls separated from bodies (Articles 14–21). The eleven articles of *De spiritualibus creaturis* again address many of those same concerns but also go on to some consideration of angels as another order of spiritual creatures besides human beings, whose natures are only partly spiritual.

During this same period, or perhaps while he was still at Orvieto, Aquinas wrote a commentary on the pseudo-Dionysian treatise *De divinis Nominibus* (*On the Divine Names*), a deeply Neoplatonist account of Christian theology dating probably from the sixth century. Aquinas, like everyone else at the time, believed that it had been written in the apostolic period by the Dionysius who had been converted by St Paul. For that reason, and perhaps also because he had first studied the book under Albert at Cologne, it had a powerful influence on Aquinas's thought. Very early in his career, while he was writing his *Scriptum*, he thought Dionysius was an Aristotelian,⁵ but while writing the commentary on this text he realized that its author must have been a Platonist.⁶ His commentary, which makes clear sense of a text that is often obscure, may, like his commentaries on Boethius, have been written for his own purposes rather than growing out of a course of lectures.

In any case, his study of Dionysius is one of the most important routes by which Platonism became an essential ingredient in his own thought.

The *Compendium theologiae* (*Compendium of Theology*), already mentioned in connection with *Summa contra gentiles*, was once thought to have been written much later and to have been left incomplete because of Aquinas's death. However, its similarity to *Summa contra gentiles* not only in style but also in content has lately led many scholars to assign it to 1265–7. Among Aquinas's four theological syntheses, the *Compendium theologiae* is unique in the brevity of its discussions and in having been organized around the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity. Had it been completed, it might have provided a novel reorientation of the vast subject matter of medieval theology, but Aquinas wrote only ten short chapters of the second section, on Hope, and none at all of the third section, on Charity. He did complete the first section on Faith, but since most of the 246 chapters in the section simply provide much briefer treatments of almost all the theological topics Aquinas had already dealt with in *Summa contra gentiles*, the *Compendium* as he left it seems important mainly as a précis of material that is developed more fully in the other work (and in *Summa theologiae*).

Rome: Aristotelian commentary

While some of Aquinas's prodigious output in Rome from 1265–8 is, broadly speaking, similar to work he had already done, it also includes two important innovations, one of which is the first of his twelve commentaries on works of Aristotle. At the beginning of his commentary on *De anima* (*Sententia super De anima*), his approach is still a little tentative and (for Aquinas) unusually concerned with technical details. These features of the work once led scholars to describe the commentary on the first book of *De anima* as a “*reportatio*” (an unedited set of notes taken at his lectures), or even to ascribe this first third of Aquinas's commentary to another author. However, René Gauthier has argued persuasively that the difference between the commentary's treatments of Book I and of Books II and III of *De anima* is explained by differences between the books themselves, and that in fact none of Aquinas's commentaries on Aristotle resulted from lectures he gave on those books.⁷ Discrepancies within this work, the first of Aquinas's Aristotelian commentaries, are likely to be at least in part a consequence of the fact that he was finding his way into this new sort of enterprise, at which he quickly became very adept. In a recent volume of essays on Aristotle's *De anima*, Martha Nussbaum describes Aquinas's work as “one of the very greatest commentaries on the work” and “very insightful”.⁸ T.H. Irwin, a leading interpreter of Aristotle, acknowledges that at one point in the *Sententia libri Ethicorum* (*Commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*), Aquinas “actually explains Aristotle's intention more clearly than Aristotle explains it himself”.⁹ Such judgments apply pretty generally to Aquinas's

Aristotelian commentaries, all of which are marked by his extraordinary ability as a philosophical commentator to discern a logical structure in almost every passage he examines in every sort of text: not only Aristotle's but also those of others, from Boethius to St Paul.

Since commenting on Aristotle was a regular feature of life for a member of a medieval arts faculty but never part of the duties of an academic theologian, Aquinas's many Aristotelian commentaries were technically extracurricular and therefore an especially impressive accomplishment for someone who was already extremely busy. Some scholars, admiring Aquinas's achievements in general but focusing on the fact that his professional career was entirely in the theology faculty, have insisted on classifying only the Aristotelian commentaries as philosophical works. Certainly these commentaries are philosophical, as purely philosophical as the Aristotelian works they elucidate. However, Aquinas wrote these commentaries not only to make good philosophical sense of Aristotle's very difficult texts but also, and more importantly, to enhance his own understanding of the topics Aristotle had dealt with. As he remarks in his commentary on *De caelo*, "the study of philosophy has as its purpose to know not what people have thought, but rather the truth about the way things are",¹⁰ and he believed that the theologian's attempt to understand God and everything else in relation to God was the fundamental instance of the universal human drive to know the truth about the way things are. On the other hand, his view of the best way of making intellectual progress in general looks very much like the age-old method of philosophy:

But if any people want to write back against what I have said, I will be very gratified, because there is no better way of uncovering the truth and keeping falsity in check than by arguing with people who disagree with you.¹¹

Rome: *Summa theologiae*

The other important innovation from Aquinas's three-year regency in Rome is *Summa theologiae*, his greatest and most characteristic work, begun in Rome and continued through the rest of his life. *Summa theologiae*, left incomplete at his death, consists of three large Parts. The First Part (Ia) is concerned with the existence and nature of God (Questions 1–43), creation (44–9), angels (50–64), the six days of creation (65–74), human nature (75–102) and divine government (103–19). The Second Part deals with morality, and in such detail that it is itself divided into two parts. The first part of the Second Part (IaIIae) takes up human happiness (Questions 1–5), human action (6–17), the goodness and badness of human acts (18–21), passions (22–48) and the sources of human acts: intrinsic (49–89) and extrinsic (90–114). The second part of the Second Part (IIaIIae) begins with

the three theological virtues and corresponding vices (Questions 1–46), goes on through the four “cardinal virtues” and corresponding vices (47–170) and ends with special issues associated with the religious life (171–89). In the Third Part, Aquinas deals with the incarnation (Questions 1–59) and the sacraments (60–90), breaking off in the middle of his discussion of penance.

Aquinas thought of *Summa theologiae* as a new kind of textbook of theology, and its most important pedagogical innovation, as he sees it, is in its organization. He says he has noticed that students new to theology have been held back in their studies by several features of the standard teaching materials, especially “because the things they have to know are not imparted in an order appropriate to a method of teaching”, an order he proposes to introduce (*ST prooemium*). It may well have been his enthusiasm for this new approach that led him to abandon work on his quite differently organized *Compendium theologiae*, and his natural preoccupation during this period with the writing of *Summa theologiae* Ia may also help to account for the fact that his other work of that time shows a special interest in the nature and operations of the human soul, the subject matter of Questions 75–89 of Ia.

Second Paris regency

In 1268 the Dominican Order again assigned Aquinas to the University of Paris, where he was regent master for a second time until, in the spring of 1272, all lectures at the university were canceled because of a dispute with the Bishop of Paris. The Dominicans then ordered Aquinas to return to Italy.

Among the astounding number of works Aquinas produced in those four years is the huge Second Part of *Summa theologiae* (*ST* IaIIae and IIaIIae), nine Aristotelian commentaries, a commentary on the pseudo-Aristotelian *Liber de causis* (which, as Aquinas was among the first to realize, is actually a compilation of Neoplatonic material drawn from Proclus), sixteen biblical commentaries and seven sets of disputed questions (including the set of sixteen *Quaestiones disputatae de malo* [*Disputed Questions On Evil*], the sixth of which provides a detailed discussion of free choice). His literary productivity during this second regency is the more amazing because he was at the same time embroiled in various controversies.

Sending Aquinas back to Paris in 1268 seems to have been, at least in part, his order’s response to the worrisome movement of “Latin Averroism” or “radical Aristotelianism”, then gaining ground among members of the arts faculty who were attracted to interpretations of Aristotle found in the commentaries of Averroes. However, only two of his many writings from these years seem to have obvious connections with the Averroist controversy. One of these, his treatise *De unitate intellectus, contra Averroistas* (*On {the Theory of} the Unicity of Intellect, against the Averroists*) is an explicit critique and rejection of a view distinctive of the movement. As Aquinas describes it, that view holds that the aspect of the human mind which

INTRODUCTION

Aristotle calls the possible intellect ... is some sort of substance separate in its being from the body and not united to it in any way as its form; and, what is more, that this possible intellect is one for all human beings.¹²

After briefly noting that this view's incompatibility with Christian doctrine is too obvious to warrant discussion at any length, Aquinas devotes the entire treatise to showing that "this position is no less contrary to the principles of philosophy than it is to the teachings of the Faith", and that it is even "entirely incompatible with the words and views" of Aristotle himself.¹³

Besides the unicity of intellect, the other controversial theory most often associated with thirteenth-century Averroism is the beginninglessness of the universe. In many of his works, Aquinas had already considered the possibility that the world had always existed, skillfully developing and defending the bold position that revelation alone provides the basis for believing that the world began to exist, that one cannot prove either that the universe must or that it could not have begun, and that a world both beginningless and created is possible (although, of course, not actual). The second of Aquinas's Parisian treatises that is plainly relevant to Averroism is *De aeternitate mundi, contra murmurantes* (*On the Eternity of the World, against Grumblers*), a very short, uncharacteristically indignant summary of his position.

Aquinas, however, could not complain that Aristotle had been misinterpreted regarding the eternity of the world; after initially supposing this to be the case, he had become convinced that Aristotle really did think he had proved that the world must have existed forever. For this reason, Aquinas's position on this issue did not distance him enough from the Averroists in the view of their contemporary "Augustinian" opponents, most notably the Franciscans Bonaventure and Pecham. In fact, the "Grumblers" against whom Aquinas directed his treatise were probably not so much the Averroists in the arts faculty as those Franciscan theologians who maintained that they had demonstrated the impossibility of a beginningless world.

Aquinas's principled dissociation from some important Franciscans on this point must have helped to make his second Paris regency much more troubled than his first. In disputations conducted in Paris in 1266–7, the Franciscan master William of Baglione implicated Aquinas's views in the propositions he attacked, claiming that things Aquinas was saying encouraged the two heretical Averroist theses denounced by Bonaventure, namely the eternity of the world and the unicity of the intellect. "The 'blind leaders of the blind' decried by William evidently include Thomas as their chief."¹⁴ It has also been persuasively argued that Aquinas's *De aeternitate mundi* was directed in particular against his Franciscan colleague in theology, John

Pecham.¹⁵ It seems, then, that Aquinas's development of a distinctly philosophical theology – which, like Albert's, was more Aristotelian than Augustinian – was dividing him from his colleagues in the Paris faculty of theology during these years. It may also have been bringing him closer to the philosophers in the arts faculty.

Last days

In June 1272 the Dominicans ordered Aquinas to leave Paris and go to Naples, where he was to establish another studium for the order and to serve as its regent master. Except for some interesting collections of sermons (originally preached in his native Italian dialect), the works dating from this period – two Aristotelian commentaries and the Third Part of *Summa theologiae* – were left unfinished. On or about 6 December 1273, while he was saying mass, something happened to Aquinas that left him unable to go on writing or dictating. He himself saw the occasion as a special revelation. When Reginald of Piperno, his principal secretary and long-time friend, pressed him to know what had happened, Aquinas explained to him that everything he had written seemed like straw to him by comparison with what he had seen and what had been revealed to him. He believed that he had at last clearly seen what he had devoted his life to figuring out and, by comparison, all he had written seemed pale and dry. Now that he could no longer write, he told Reginald, he wanted to die.¹⁶ Soon afterwards he did die, on 7 March 1274 at Fossanuova, Italy, on his way to the Council of Lyons, which he had been ordered to attend.

Metaphysics

Every part of Aquinas's philosophy is imbued with metaphysical principles, many of which are recognizably Aristotelian. Consequently, concepts such as potentiality and actuality, matter and form, substance, essence, accident and the four causes – all of which are fundamental in Aquinas's metaphysics – have an Aristotelian context. Aquinas invokes such principles often, and he employs them implicitly even more often. Two of his earliest writings – *De principiis naturae* (*On the Principles of Nature*) and especially *De ente et essentia* (*On Being and Essence*) – outline much of his metaphysics. Perhaps the most important thesis argued in *De ente et essentia* is the one that became known as “the real distinction”, Aquinas's view that the essence of any created thing is really, not just conceptually, distinct from its existence. Metaphysically speaking, corporeal beings are composites of form and matter, but all creatures, even incorporeal ones, are composites of essence and existence. Only the first, uncreated cause, God, whose essence is existence, is absolutely simple.

Except for his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Aquinas devoted no mature treatise to metaphysics itself. However, since he considers meta-

INTRODUCTION

physics to be the science of being considered generally (*ens commune*), and since he argues that being itself is first of all God himself and that all being depends on God, his philosophy does begin with metaphysics insofar as the most systematic presentations of his thought (in *Summa contra gentiles* and *Summa theologiae*) start with the investigation of God-in-himself considered as the foundation of the nature and existence of everything.¹⁷

Being, Aquinas says, is intellect's most fundamental conception,

inherently its most intelligible object and the one in which it finds the basis of all conceptions ... Consequently all of intellect's other conceptions must be arrived at by adding to being ... insofar as they express a mode of being which is not expressed by the term "being" itself.¹⁸

There are, he claims, just two legitimate ways of making such additions. The first results in the ten Aristotelian Categories, each of which is a "specified [or specific] mode of being" – substance, quantity, quality and the rest. The results of "adding to being" in the second way are less familiar. Aquinas takes them to be five modes of being that are entirely general, characterizing absolutely every being. That is, being, wherever and however instantiated, exhibits these five modes, which transcend the Categories because they are necessary modes of all specified being: thing (*res*), one, something (*aliquid*), good, true. These five, together with being itself, are the transcendentals, predicable correctly of absolutely anything that is. *Good* and *true* are the philosophically interesting cases, because some beings are obviously not good and because *true* seems applicable only to propositions.

The claim that all beings are true depends on taking 'true' in the sense of 'genuine', as in 'true friend', a sense that had been explored in detail by Anselm of Canterbury. In Anselm's view, any being is true in this sense to the extent to which it agrees with the divine idea of such a thing (and is false to the extent that it does not agree). Absolutely every thing that is agrees at least to some extent with the divine idea that is an ingredient in its causal explanation. Propositions are true if they correspond to the way things are in the world; things in the world are true if they correspond to what is in the mind, God's mind first, ours derivatively. So, Aquinas says:

in the soul there is a cognitive and an appetitive power. The word 'good', then, expresses the conformity of a being to appetite (as is said at the beginning of the Ethics: 'The good is what all desire'). The word 'true', however, expresses the conformity of a being to intellect.¹⁹

The central thesis of Aquinas's meta-ethics grows out of the theory of the transcendentals. The thesis is the metaphysical principle that the terms

'being' and 'good' are the same in reference, differing only in sense.²⁰ What all desire is what they take to be the good, and what is desired is at least perceived as desirable.²¹ Desirability is thus an essential aspect of goodness. If a thing of a certain kind is genuinely desirable as a thing of that kind, it is desirable to the extent to which it is perfect of that kind: a complete specimen, free from relevant defect. But a thing is perfect of its kind to the extent to which it has actualized its specifying potentialities, the potentialities that differentiate its species from other species in the same genus. So, Aquinas says, a thing is desirable as a thing of its kind and hence good of that kind to the extent to which it is actualized and in being.²² Generally, then, 'being' and 'goodness' have the same referent: all being, including the actualization of specifying potentialities. The actualization of a thing's specifying potentialities to at least some extent is on the one hand its existence as such a thing; it is in this sense that the thing is said to have being. On the other hand, however, the actualization of a thing's specifying potentialities is, to the extent of the actualization, that thing's being whole, complete, free from defect: the state all things are naturally aimed at. It is in this sense that the thing is said to have goodness.²³

Aquinas's concept of analogy is important to his thought. It is often presented, correctly, in terms of analogical predication. However, his concept of analogy can be explained at a more fundamental level in connection with causation. Setting aside "accidental" causation – for example, a gardener's uncovering buried treasure – Aquinas thinks that efficient causation always involves an agent (A), a patient (P) and a form (*f*). In non-accidental efficient causation, A antecedently has *f*, somehow. A's exercising causal power on P brings about *f* in P, somehow. Thus the efficient cause is A's acting (or exercising a power it has), and the effect is P's having *f*. The fact that A and P can have *f* in several different ways is what is brought out in 'somehow'. The paradigm – straightforward efficient causation – is the kind that Aquinas calls univocal: cases in which first A and then P have *f* in just the same way, and in which *f* can therefore be predicated truly of each in just the same sense. The metal hotplate and the metal kettle bottom resting on it are both called hot univocally: the form *heat* in these two causally related objects is the same specifically and differs only numerically.

However, Aquinas also recognizes two kinds of non-univocal efficient causation. The first, equivocal causation, characterizes cases in which there is no obvious respect in which to say that the *f* effected in P is found antecedently in A, and yet there is a natural causal connection (as there standardly is an etymological explanation for equivocal predication). If A is solar power and its effect is the hardening (*f*) of some clay (P), then obviously the sun's power is not itself hard, as the clay is. To say what it is about solar power that hardens clay will not be as easy as explaining the heating of the kettle, and yet the hardening of the clay must, somehow, be brought about

by that power. In such a case, A has *f* only in the sense that A has the power to bring about *f* in P.

Second, analogical causation occurs when, for instance, a blood sample (P) is correctly labeled ‘anemic’, although of course the blood itself does not have anemia and cannot literally be anemic. The physiology of the sample’s donor (A) brings about a condition (*f*) in the sample that is an unmistakable sign of anemia in A, thus justifying that (analogical) labeling of the sample.

For theological purposes, Aquinas is interested not in natural analogical causation but rather in the artificial kind: the kind that involves ideas and volitions, the artisan’s kind.

In other agents [the form of what is to be brought about occurs antecedently] in keeping with intelligible being, as in those agents that act through intellect – the way a likeness of the house exists antecedently in the builder’s mind.²⁴

Since the status of entirely univocal causation depends on there being a merely numerical difference between the *f* in A and the *f* in P, an intellective agent effecting its ideas is obviously not a univocal cause. But nor is this difference between the antecedent *f* and the consequent *f* so wide as to constitute equivocal causation. In fact, the kind of association between the idea and its external manifestation is closer than the kind found in natural analogical causation; and since, in Aquinas’s view, “the world was brought about not by chance but by God acting through intellect ... it is necessary that there be a form in the divine mind, a form in the likeness of which the world was made”.²⁵ God, then, is the non-univocal, non-equivocal, intellectually analogical efficient cause of the world.

Philosophy of mind

Aquinas’s philosophy of mind is part of his more general theory of soul, which naturally makes use of his metaphysics. Obviously he is not a materialist – most obviously because God, the absolutely fundamental reality in his metaphysics, is in no way material. Aquinas classifies every thing other than God as either corporeal or incorporeal (spiritual); he sometimes calls purely spiritual creatures – such as angels – ‘separated substances’ because of their essential detachment from body of any sort. However, this exhaustive division is not perfectly exclusive because human beings, simply by virtue of the human soul, must be classified not as simply corporeal but also as spiritual in a certain respect.

Merely having a soul of some sort is not enough to give a creature a spiritual component, however. Every animate creature has a soul (*anima*) – “soul is what we call the first principle of life in things that live among us”²⁶ – but

neither plants nor non-human animals are in any respect spiritual. Aquinas holds that even the merely nutritive soul of a plant, or the nutritive + sensory soul of a beast, is like the soul of a human being in being the form of a body. No soul, no first principle of life, can be matter. On the other hand, any vegetable or animal body has the life it has only in virtue of being a body whose special organization confers on it natural potentialities: that is, in virtue of the substantial form that makes it actually be such a body. Therefore, the first principle of life in a living non-human body, its soul, is no bodily part of that body but is rather its form, one of the two metaphysical components of the composite of matter and form that every body is. For plants and beasts, unlike humans, the form that is the soul goes out of existence when the composite dies, and it is in that sense that the souls of plants and beasts are not spiritual.

Only the soul of a human being is analysed as nutritive + sensory + rational. Aquinas thinks of this soul not as three nested, cooperating forms, but as the single substantial form that gives a human being its specifically human mode of existence. (In defending this thesis of the unicity of substantial form, Aquinas differed from many of his contemporaries.) He often designates this entire substantial form by its distinctively human aspect of rationality. He also thinks that the human soul, unlike the souls of plants and beasts, is subsistent: that is, it continues to exist after separating from the body in death. He says, for example: "It is necessary to say that that which is the principle of intellective activity, what we call the soul of a human being, is an incorporeal, subsistent principle."²⁷ The human soul, just because it is distinctively mind (the principle of intellective activity), must therefore be described not only as incorporeal but also as subsistent.

It may seem impossible for Aquinas's account to accommodate the theological doctrine that souls persist and engage in mental acts after the death of the body. If the separated soul is a form, what is it a form of? Aquinas is not a universal hylomorphist; unlike some of his contemporaries, he does not think that there is "spiritual matter" that angels or disembodied souls have as one of their components, but rather that they are separated forms that configure no matter at all. Thus when he claims that the soul exists apart from the body, he seems to be holding the view that there can be a form with nothing of which it is the form. Moreover, Aquinas thinks that an angel or the soul separated from the body engages in mental activity. However, a form seems not to be the sort of thing that engages in acts of any sort, and so it appears that even if there were some way to explain the existence of the soul apart from the body, its acting could not be explained.

In this connection, it is helpful to examine Aquinas's broader view of form. The world is ordered metaphysically in such a way that at the top of the universal hierarchy there are forms – God and angels – that are not forms of anything. Near the bottom of the hierarchy are forms that configure matter but cannot exist in their own right, apart from the corporeal composites they

inform. The forms of inanimate things and of animate, non-rational things are of that sort. Those forms inform matter, but when the resultant composites cease to exist, those forms also cease to exist. In the middle – “on the borderline between corporeal and separated [that is, purely spiritual] substances” – are human souls, the metaphysical amphibians.²⁸ Like angels, human souls are subsistent, able to exist on their own; but, like the forms of inanimate things, human souls configure matter.

Seeing the soul in this light helps to explain some of what is initially puzzling in Aquinas’s account. The human soul has a double character. On the one hand, unlike the forms of other material things, it is created by God as an individual entity in its own right, able to exist by itself as do purely immaterial angels. On the other hand, like the form of any corporeal thing, it exists in the composite it configures, and it comes into existence only with that composite, not before it.

Theory of knowledge

Nature, Aquinas thinks, must be arranged so as to enable human beings in general to satisfy their natural desire to know.²⁹ His view of the arrangement actually provided seems at first too tight to be true, involving some sort of formal identity between the extramental object (O) and the cognizing faculty (F) in its actually cognizing O. However, Aquinas takes that (Aristotelian) identity claim to mean only that the form of O is somehow in F.³⁰ O’s form comes to be in F when F receives species, either sensory or intellective, of O. These species may be thought of as encodings of O’s form. If O is a particular corporeal object – an iron hoop, for instance – then in O itself, O’s form informs matter to produce an iron hoop of just those dimensions at just that spatio-temporal location. (In Aquinas’s account of individuation, it is matter that is ‘signate’ that individuates O’s form.) But when the appropriately encoded form is received in an external sense faculty F (which uses a bodily organ), then, even though it is received materially in F’s matter, it is nonetheless received differently from its reception in the matter of the hoop. The imposition of the form on the matter of the sense organ constitutes an “intentional” or “spiritual” reception of the form, contributing to a cognition of the hoop rather than metaphysically constituting a new, individuated matter-form composite.

Sensory species received in external senses are standardly transmitted to “internal senses”, the organs for which, Aquinas thought, must be located in the brain. Among the most important of these for purposes of cognition are phantasia and imagination (although Aquinas usually treats imagination as part of the power of phantasia). Phantasia and imagination produce and preserve phantasms, the sensory data that are necessary preconditions for intellective cognition. Imagination and phantasia are also indispensable to conscious sensory cognition. In Aquinas’s view, sensible species themselves

are not the objects of cognition, and what he says about phantasia suggests that having sensible species is not sufficient for having sensory cognition. O itself, currently having a natural effect on the external senses, is consciously sensed because phantasia has processed O's sensible species into phantasms.

The form presented in a phantasm has of course been stripped of its original, individuating matter, but a phantasm of O remains particularized as a phantasm in virtue of having been received in the different matter of phantasia's organ, while remaining recognizably the form of O because of the details of O that are preserved in it. However, cognition of O as an iron hoop is conceptual, intellective cognition, for which phantasms are only the raw material.

In intellect itself, Aquinas distinguishes two Aristotelian "powers". The first is agent intellect, the essentially active or productive aspect of intellect, which acts on phantasms in a way that produces "intelligible species". These constitute the primary contents of intellect, stored in possible intellect, intellect's essentially receptive aspect.

Through intellect it is natural for us to have cognition of natures. Of course, [as universals] natures do not have existence except in individuating matter. It is natural for us to have cognition of them, however, not as they are in individuating matter but as they are abstracted from it by intellect's consideration.³¹

This is the work of agent intellect, producing intelligible species. The intelligible species of O are unlike sensory species of it in that they are only universals, which occur as such only in possible intellect: for example, round, metallic, iron hoop. These "universal natures" are not only received in the intellective faculty F, the possible intellect, but are also of course used regularly as the devices indispensable for intellective cognition of corporeal reality:

Our intellect both abstracts intelligible species from phantasms, insofar as it considers the natures of things universally, and yet also has intellective cognition of them [the things] in the phantasms, since without attending to phantasms it cannot have intellective cognition of even those things whose [intelligible] species it abstracts.³²

It is in this way that "in intellection we can have cognition of such [particular, corporeal, composite] things in universality, which is beyond the faculty of sense".³³

Thus both sense and intellect have cognition of O, a particular corporeal thing. However, sense has cognition of O only in its particularity.³⁴ Further, an individual intellect that happened to have the concept *iron hoop* would

have cognition only of a universal nature that happened to be instantiated in O, and not also of any instantiation of that nature – unless that intellect were also attending to phantasms of O. It is as a result of this attending that intellect also cognizes O itself, but as exemplifying a universal, for example, as an iron hoop.³⁵

Although intellect regularly has cognition of a corporeal particular in the way described, its proper object, Aquinas says, is that particular's universal nature, or "quiddity". Intellect's "first operation", then, is its cognition of a universal, its proper object (although as we have seen, agent intellect's abstracting of intelligible species is a necessary step on the way to the cognition of the quiddities of things). Aquinas sometimes calls this first operation "understanding". However, *scientia*, which is one of the last operations of intellect (the operation of discursive reasoning) and which is a pinnacle of intellectual cognition, also has the natures of things as its objects. Universal natures, the proper objects of intellect's first operation and the objects of the culminating theoretical knowledge of nature, must then be thought of as proper objects of both the beginning and the culmination of intellectual cognition. What is cognized in an unanalyzed way in the first operation of the intellect – for example, *animal* – is in scientific cognition analyzed into the essential parts of its nature – *sensitive animate corporeality* – which are themselves comprehended in terms of all their characters and capacities. In theory, in potentiality, the culminating cognitive state is all that could be hoped for: "if the human intellect comprehends the substance of any thing – a rock, for example, or a triangle – none of the intelligible aspects of that thing exceeds the capacity of human reason."³⁶

Intellect's "second operation" includes the making of judgments, affirming by propositionally "compounding" with one another concepts acquired in the first operation, or denying by "dividing" them from one another. At every stage past initial acquisition, the cognition of quiddities will partially depend on this second operation, and on reasoning as well:

the human intellect does not immediately, in its first apprehension, acquire a complete cognition of the thing. Instead, it first apprehends something about it – that is, its quiddity, which is a first and proper object of intellect; and then it acquires intellectual cognition of the properties, accidents, and dispositions associated with the thing's essence. In doing so it has to compound one apprehended aspect with another, or divide one from another, and proceed from one composition or division to another, which is reasoning.³⁷

Reasoning is sometimes called intellect's third operation.

The framing of propositions and the construction of inferences involving them are necessary preconditions of the culminating intellectual cognition Aquinas recognizes as *scientia*, which he discusses in greatest detail in his

Sententia super Posteriora analytica (Commentary on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*). The interpretation of his account of *scientia* is controversial, but one helpful way to view it is as follows. To cognize a proposition with *scientia* is, strictly speaking, to accept it as the conclusion of a "demonstration". Of course, many premises in demonstrations may themselves be conclusions of other demonstrations; some, however, must be accepted not on the basis of demonstration but *per se*.³⁸

Such propositions, knowable *per se* (although not always *per se* knowable by us) are Aquinas's first principles. Like Aristotle, he thinks of them as immediate propositions; that is, they cannot themselves be the conclusions of demonstrations, and their truth is evident to anyone who fully understands their terms, who not merely grasps their ordinary meaning but also comprehends the real nature of their referents. The predicate of an immediate proposition belongs to the *ratio* of the proposition's subject, and the *ratio* is the formulation of the subject's real nature.³⁹ Thus, for example, Aquinas considers 'God exists' to be self-evident, since according to the doctrine of simplicity, God's nature is God's existence. 'God exists' is a good example of a proposition knowable *per se* but, as Aquinas insists, not knowable *per se* by us. It is for that reason that he develops a number of *a posteriori* arguments for God's existence, among which the most famous are the "Five Ways", found in *ST* Ia.2.3.

Anyone who has a developed concept of the subject's real nature is certain of the truth of such an immediate proposition:

but there are some immediate propositions the terms of which not everyone knows. That is why although the predicate of such a proposition does belong to the ratio of its subject, the proposition need not be granted by everyone, just because its subject's [metaphysical] definition is not known to everyone.⁴⁰

Because proper demonstrations are isomorphic with metaphysical reality, the facts expressed in their premises are regularly to be construed as causes, of the facts in their conclusions,⁴¹ although in some cases demonstrative reasoning goes the other way, from effects to causes. So, having *scientia* with respect to some proposition is the fullest possible human cognition, by which one situates the fact expressed by a conclusion in an explanatory theory that accurately maps metaphysical or physical reality.

According to Aquinas, then, what demonstration provides is not so much knowledge, as it has been conceived of by classical foundationalists such as Descartes, as it is depth of understanding and explanatory insight. In general, Aquinas does not begin with self-evident principles and derive conclusions from them deductively; "rather [he begins] with a statement to be justified (it will become the 'conclusion' only in a formal restatement of the argument) and 'reduce[s]' it back to its ultimate explanatory principles."⁴² When

Aquinas himself describes his project generally, he says that there are two different processes in which human reason engages: discovery (or invention) and judgment. When we engage in discovery, we proceed from first principles, reasoning from them to other things; in judgment we reason to first principles on the basis of a kind of analysis. In his view, it is judgment's reasoning process, not that of discovery, that leads to *scientia*, and judgment is the subject of the *Posterior Analytics*: "Judgment goes with the certitude of *scientia*. And it is because we cannot have certain judgment about effects except by analysis leading to first principles that this part of human reasoning is called 'analytics'."⁴³

Sceptical worries seldom intrude on Aquinas's scattered development of his systematically unified theory of knowledge, largely because it is based on a metaphysics in which the first principle of existence is an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God, whose rational creatures could not have been made so as to be standardly mistaken about the rest of creation.

Will and action

Philosophy of mind is obviously relevant to epistemology in its account of the mechanisms of cognition, especially of intellect. In its account of will, it is just as obviously relevant to action theory and to ethics. Aquinas's concern with moral issues is even greater than his considerable interest in epistemological issues, and his ethics is so fully developed that he integrates his systematic treatment of acts of will into it rather than including such a treatment in his philosophy of mind.

As intellect is the cognitive faculty of the distinctively human rational soul, so will is its appetitive faculty. As a kind of natural inclination, will's metaphysical provenance is more primitive than intellect's, because will is the most subtle terrestrial instantiation of an utterly universal aspect of creation. Not only every sort of soul but absolutely every form, Aquinas maintains, has some sort of inclination essentially associated with it; and so every hylomorphic thing, even if inanimate, has at least one natural inclination: "on the basis of its form, fire, for instance, is inclined toward a higher place, and toward generating its like."⁴⁴ Inclination is the genus of appetite, and appetite is the genus of will. The human soul of course involves natural appetites (for example, for food), but its sensory and intellective modes of cognition bring with them sensory appetites, or passions (for example, for seafood), and rational appetites, or volitions (for example, for food low in fat content).

In human beings, sensory appetite is a cluster of inclinations (passions) to which we are subject (passive) by animal nature. Following an Aristotelian line, Aquinas thinks of sensory appetite as sorted into two complementary powers: the concupiscible (that is, pursuit/avoidance appetite) and the irascible (that is, competition/aggression/defense appetite). With the former are

associated the passions of joy and sadness, love and hate, desire and repugnance; with the latter, daring and fear, hope and despair, anger.

For philosophy of mind and for ethics, one important issue is the manner and extent of the rational faculties' control of sensory appetite; a control without which the harmony of the human soul is threatened and morality is impossible, especially in Aquinas's reason-centered ethics with its focus on virtues and vices. A human being who is not aberrantly behaving like a non-rational animal "is not immediately moved in accordance with the irascible and concupiscible appetite but waits for the command of will, which is the higher appetite".⁴⁵ But the kind of control exercised by a cognitive rational faculty standardly identified in this role as "practical reason" rather than the broader "intellect" is less obvious, and is particularly interesting in view of Aquinas's account of intellective cognition.

The rational faculties can direct the attention of the external senses and compensate to some extent for their malfunctioning, but they cannot directly control what the external senses initially perceive on any occasion. On the other hand, sensory appetite and the internal senses are not directly related to mind-independent external things, and so to some extent "they are subject to reason's command", although they too can fight against reason.⁴⁶ Elaborating an Aristotelian theme,⁴⁷ Aquinas observes that the soul's rule over the body is "despotic": in a normal body, any bodily part that can be moved by an act of will in fact will be moved immediately when and as will commands. But the rational faculties rule sensory appetite "politically", because the powers and passions that are the intended subjects of this rational governance are also moved by imagination and sense, and so are no slaves to reason. "That is why we experience the irascible or the concupiscible fighting against reason when we sense or imagine something pleasant that reason forbids, or something unpleasant that reason commands."⁴⁸

According to Aquinas, the volition for happiness in general is an ineluctable part of human nature. Nonetheless, "the movement of a creature's will is not determined in particular to seeking happiness in this, or in that".⁴⁹ This sort of freedom of will is freedom of specification or "freedom as regards the object", the freedom in the "determining" aspect of volition. It is distinguished from freedom of exercise or "freedom as regards the act", the freedom associated with will's "executive" capacity, for either acting or not acting to achieve something apprehended as good.

The interpretation of Aquinas's account of freedom of will is controversial. The very phrase 'freedom of will' is part of the difficulty. Aquinas often speaks of *liberum arbitrium* (free decision or judgment); and although this Latin phrase is often translated as 'free will', *liberum arbitrium* cannot be attributed to will alone. It is a power that inheres in the system of intellect and will as a whole and emerges from their interaction. However, it is perhaps safe to say that, since Aquinas emphatically denies that any volition

caused by something extrinsic to the agent can be free, his account of freedom of will is not a version of compatibilism.⁵⁰ The one apparent exception has to do with God's acting on a human will. Aquinas holds that among extrinsic forces, God alone can act directly on some other person's will without violating the will's nature, that is, without undermining its freedom.⁵¹ On this basis, some interpreters characterize Aquinas as a theological compatibilist; however, the subtle complexities of his account of God's action on human wills leads others to claim that a full appreciation of those complexities would show that Aquinas is not in any sense a compatibilist.

Aquinas's analysis of human action, built on his account of will and intellect, is complicated and not readily summarized. Generally speaking, he finds elaborately ordered mental components in even simple acts. For instance, in a case of raising one's hand to attract attention we are likely to suppose that the mental antecedents of the bodily movement are just the agent's combined beliefs and desires, whether or not the agent is fully conscious of them. Aquinas would of course agree that the agent need not be completely aware of the overt action's mental antecedents, but he sees them as having a complex, hierarchical structure. Although this structure can look deterministic, it is not on Aquinas's view because at almost any point in the interaction between intellect and will, will could direct intellect to reconsider, to direct attention in some other way, or even just to direct intellect to stop thinking about the issue.⁵²

Ethics, law and politics

Aquinas's moral theory is developed most extensively and systematically in the Second Part of *Summa theologiae*. (Broadly speaking, the general theory is in IaIIae and the detailed consideration of particular issues is in IIaIIae.) Like almost all his predecessors, medieval and ancient, Aquinas sees ethics as having two principal topics: first, the ultimate goal of human existence, and second, how that goal is to be won, or lost. Of the 303 Questions making up *Summa theologiae*'s Second Part, 298 are concerned in one way or another with the second topic, and only the first 5 are concerned directly with the first (although in *SCG* III he devotes Chapters 25–40 to a detailed examination of it).

Summa theologiae IaIIae.1–5, sometimes called 'the Treatise on Happiness', develops an argument to establish the existence and nature of a single ultimate end for all human action, or, more strictly, the kind of behavior over which a person has "control". First, "all actions that proceed from a power are caused by that power in accordance with the nature of its object. But the object of will is an end and a good", that is, an end perceived as good by the willer's intellect.⁵³ From this starting point, Aquinas develops an argument designed to show that a human being necessarily (though not always consciously) seeks everything it seeks for its own ultimate end, happiness.

Aquinas argues that the often unrecognized genuine ultimate end for which human beings exist (their “object”) is God, perfect goodness personified; and perfect happiness, the ultimate end with which they may exist (their “use” of that object), is the enjoyment of the end for which they exist. That enjoyment is fully achieved only in the beatific vision, which Aquinas conceives of as an activity. Since the beatific vision involves the contemplation of the ultimate (first) cause of everything, it is, whatever else it may be, also the perfection of all knowledge and understanding.⁵⁴

Aquinas devotes just four questions of *ST IaIIae* (18–21) to “the goodness and badness of human acts in general”. Although considerations of rightness and wrongness occupy only a fraction of the discussion in Questions 18–21, Aquinas nonetheless appears to think of rightness and wrongness as the practical, distinctively moral evaluations of actions. His emphasis on the broader notions of goodness and badness reveals the root of his moral evaluation of actions in his metaphysical identification of being and goodness.

What makes an action morally bad is its moving the agent not towards, but away from, the agent’s ultimate goal. Such a deviation is patently irrational, and Aquinas’s analysis of the moral badness of human action identifies it fundamentally as irrationality, since irrationality is an obstacle to the actualization of a human being’s specifying potentialities, those that make *rational* the differentia of the human species. In this as in every other respect, Aquinas’s ethics is reason-centered:

In connection with human acts the words ‘good’ and ‘bad’ are applied on the basis of a comparison to reason, because ... a human being’s good is existing in accordance with reason, while what is bad for a human being is whatever is contrary to reason. For what is good for any thing is what goes together with it in keeping with its form, and what is bad for it is whatever is contrary to the order associated with its form.⁵⁵

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that Aquinas takes moral evil to consist in intellectual error. Because of the very close relationship he sees between intellect and will, the irrationality of moral wrongdoing will be a function of will as well, not just of intellect. In Aquinas’s view, the moral evaluation of a human action attaches primarily to the “internal act”, the volition from which the external act derives. Since “will is inclined toward reason’s good [the good presented to will by intellect] by the very nature of the power of will”, bad volition stems from defective deliberation.⁵⁶ As intellect and will continually influence each other, so bad deliberation can also be an effect of bad volition. Moreover, practical intellect’s mistakes in identifying the best available course of action may also have the passions of the sensory soul as sources.

INTRODUCTION

Furthermore, “because the good [presented by intellect] is varied in many ways, it is necessary that will be inclined through some habit toward some determinate good presented by reason so that [will’s determining] activity may follow more promptly”.⁵⁷ Habits of will are conditions necessary for our carrying out our volitions in particularly good or particularly bad ways, as regards both the “executive” and the “determining” aspects of volition; and the habits that play these crucial roles in Aquinas’s moral theory are the virtues and the vices.

The four cardinal virtues can be understood as habits of this sort. Reason’s habit of good governance generally is prudence; reason’s restraint which wards off self-serving concupiscence is temperance; reason’s persevering rather than giving in to self-serving irascible passions such as fear is courage; reason’s governance of one’s relations with others is justice. Aquinas’s normative ethics is based on virtues; it is concerned with dispositions and then with actions stemming from those dispositions.

In addition to the moral virtues in all their various manifestations, Aquinas also recognizes intellectual virtues that, like the moral virtues, can be acquired by human effort. On the other hand, the supreme theological virtues of faith, hope and charity cannot be acquired but must be directly infused by God. Aquinas introduces these virtues and others in *Summa theologiae* IaIIae. 49–88 and examines them in detail throughout IIaIIae.

Passions, virtues and vices are all intrinsic principles, or sources, of human acts. However, there are extrinsic principles as well, among which is law in all its varieties. Consequently, Aquinas moves on in *Summa theologiae* IaIIae.90–108 to his Treatise on Law, a famous and original treatment of the subject. The best-known feature of the treatise is Aquinas’s concept of natural law. Law in general is “a kind of rational ordering for the common good, promulgated by the one who takes care of the community”,⁵⁸ and

the precepts of natural law are to practical reasoning what the first principles of demonstrations are to theoretical reasoning ... All things to be done or to be avoided pertain to the precepts of natural law, which practical reasoning apprehends naturally as being human goods.⁵⁹

Human laws of all kinds derive, or should derive, from natural law, which might be construed as the naturally knowable rational principles underlying morality in general:

From the precepts of natural law, as from general, indemonstrable principles, it is necessary that human reason proceed to making more particular arrangements ... [which] are called human laws, provided that they pertain to the definition (*ratio*) of law already stated.⁶⁰

As a consequence of this hierarchy of laws, Aquinas unhesitatingly rejects some kinds and some particular instances of human law, for example: “A tyrannical law, since it is not in accord with reason, is not unconditionally a law but is, rather, a perversion of law.”⁶¹ Even natural law rests on the more fundamental “eternal law”, which Aquinas identifies as divine providence, “the very nature of the governance of things on the part of God as ruler of the universe”.⁶²

In *De regimine principum* (*The Governance of Rulers*), his most important political work, Aquinas begins by sounding the familiar medieval theme: monarchy is the best form of government. He is careful, however, to distinguish a monarch from a tyrant; the first wields his power primarily for the well-being of his people, and the second wields his power first and foremost for his own well-being. Aquinas also realizes that a single ruler is easily corrupted and that monarchy therefore has a tendency to turn into tyranny. He countenances disobedience and even revolution against a monarch who has become a tyrant only in special circumstances, but he does maintain that in those circumstances radical means, including tyrannicide, may be justified (*De regimine principum* 6). Perhaps because he appreciates the dangers in monarchy, he works republican elements into his theory of good government. His later commentary on Aristotle’s *Politics* emphasizes the citizen as one who rules and is ruled in turn. There is also a strongly egalitarian element in his theory of political justice.

Theology: natural, revealed and philosophical

Because Aquinas developed most of his thought within the formal confines of thirteenth-century theology, and because this has in turn affected his place in the history of philosophy and the assessment of his work, some attention must be paid to the ways in which much of what we recognize as philosophy was an essential component of what he thought of as theology.

Aquinas devotes the first three books of *Summa contra gentiles* to a systematic development of natural theology, which he saw as part of philosophy (cf. *ST* Ia.1.1 ad 2). As part of philosophy, natural theology must of course be based entirely on “principles known by the natural light of intellect”,⁶³ principles of the sort that underlie Aristotle’s metaphysics, which Aristotle himself thought of as culminating in theology (see Aquinas’s interpretation of that thought in the proemium to his *Sententia super Metaphysicam* (*Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics*)). In fact, the way Aquinas works in *SCG* I–III strongly suggests that he may have thought of natural theology as a science subordinate to metaphysics, somewhat as he would have understood optics to be subordinate to geometry.

However, there is something odd about that project of his. By Aquinas’s day, the churchmen governing universities had overcome most of their initial misgivings about the recently recovered works of the pagan Aristotle,

and had acknowledged officially that the study of Aristotelian physics and metaphysics (with their integrated minor component of natural theology) was compatible with the then universally recognized availability of revealed truths about God. Medieval Christians had come to appreciate the ancient philosophers' attempts to uncover truths about God on the basis of observation and reasoning alone as having been justified, even commendable, given their total ignorance of revelation. However, no philosopher in Aquinas's circumstances could have justifiably undertaken a new project of natural theology heuristically.

Still, no opprobrium would attach to natural theology taken up expositionally. The aim of such an enterprise would be not to develop theology from scratch but rather to show, in the spirit of Romans 1:20, the extent to which what had been supernaturally revealed could, in theory, have been naturally discovered. Such an enterprise is what *SCG* I–III seems to represent.

Evidence from a chronicle written about seventy years after Aquinas began *Summa contra gentiles* once led scholars to suppose that he had written it as a manual for the use of Dominican missionaries to Muslims and Jews. If that were so, then the work's presentation of natural instead of revealed theology in its first three books would have been dictated by the practical purpose of rationally deriving the truth about God, and about God's relation to everything else, for people who would not have acknowledged the revealed texts that Aquinas would otherwise have cited as the source of that truth. But nobody, and certainly not Aquinas, could have supposed that Muslims or Jews needed to be argued into perfect-being monotheism of the sort developed in those first three books, which contain nothing that he would have taken to be contrary to Judaism or Islam. If Aquinas had intended *Summa contra gentiles* as a manual for missionaries to educated Muslims, Jews or Christian heretics, he would have wasted the enormous effort represented in the 366 copiously argued chapters of Books I–III (see Gauthier 1961, 1993, for a persuasive rejection of the earlier account).

What Aquinas himself says about his purpose in writing *Summa contra gentiles* suggests that what he wrote had at least its formal cause not in an attempt to aid missionary activities, but instead in his consideration of the inter-relation of philosophy and Christianity. He begins by writing about the concerns of a wise person, one of those “who give things an appropriate order and direction and govern them well”.⁶⁴ Obviously, such a person has to be concerned with goals and sources, and so the wisest person will be “one whose attention is turned toward the universal goal, which is also the universal source”, which Aquinas takes to be God.⁶⁵ Because this natural theology is oriented as it is, “it must be called the greatest wisdom itself, as considering the absolutely highest cause of all”.⁶⁶ Therefore, the highest, most universal explanatory truth must be wisdom's concern.

Anyone aspiring to wisdom will attend to metaphysics, since, Aquinas reports, Aristotle rightly identified metaphysics as “the science of truth – not

of just any truth, but of the truth that is the origin of all truth, the truth that pertains to the first principle of being for all things”.⁶⁷ And, as he says in an observation that suits his own enterprise, “sometimes divine wisdom proceeds from human philosophy’s starting points”.⁶⁸ However, since it is the business of one and the same science

to pursue one of two contraries and to repel the other ... the role of the wise person is to meditate on the truth, especially the truth regarding the first principle, and to discuss it with others, but also to fight against the falsity that is its contrary.⁶⁹

The truth regarding the first principle will be the truth about God, supposing natural theology can show that God exists; and so the explanatory truth associated here with metaphysics is the truth associated also with theology.

No one knows what title, if any, Aquinas himself gave to this work. In some of its medieval manuscripts, it is entitled *Liber de veritate catholicae fidei contra errores* (*A Book About the Truth of the Catholic Faith, Directed Against Mistakes*), a title that comes closer to accurately representing the book’s aim and contents than the more pugnacious, traditional *Summa contra gentiles* (*Synopsis [of Christian Doctrine] Directed Against Unbelievers*). During the nineteenth century, when *Summa theologiae* was instead normally referred to as *Summa theologica* (*Theological Synopsis*), *Summa contra gentiles* was sometimes published under the deliberately contrasting title *Summa philosophica* (*Philosophical Synopsis*). That contrast, although potentially misleading, has some truth in it, as may be seen in Aquinas’s plan for *SCG* I–III:

Since we intend to pursue by way of reason the things about God that human reason can investigate, the first consideration is of matters associated with God considered in himself [Book I]; second, of the emergence of created things from him [Book II]; third, of the ordering and directing of created things toward him as their goal [Book III].⁷⁰

In this pursuit by way of reason, Aquinas must and does shun “authoritative arguments” of any sort, but he shows good sense in not restricting himself to “demonstrative arguments” in developing natural theology. He does, of course, use demonstrative arguments when he thinks he has them, but, like almost all philosophers of any period, he recognizes philosophy’s need for “probable arguments” as well. A demonstrative argument takes as its premisses propositions that explain the fact in the argument’s conclusion by elucidating its causes (or, sometimes, its effects), and so it produces, or presents, scientific understanding. A probable argument, the sort that has always been most prevalent in philosophy, is one based on premisses of any sort that are accepted widely or

by experts in the relevant field; and so one group may be convinced by a probable argument that another group rejects. Of course, Aquinas has to make use of authoritative arguments in the fourth (and last) book, where he turns from natural to revealed theology, and his tolerance of them there is part of what distinguishes Book IV's argumentation from the sort that characterizes Books I–III.

In *SCG IV*, Aquinas engages in what has come to be called philosophical theology, the application of reason to revelation. Philosophical theology shares the methods of natural theology broadly conceived – in other words, analysis and argumentation of all the sorts accepted in philosophy – but it lifts natural theology's restriction on premisses, accepting as assumptions revealed propositions. This includes those that are initially inaccessible to unaided reason, such as the “mysteries” of Christian doctrine. In his many works of philosophical theology, Aquinas tests the coherence of doctrinal propositions (including the mysteries), attempts explanations of them, uncovers their logical connections with other doctrinal propositions and so on, in order to bear out his conviction that the doctrines themselves are eminently understandable and acceptable, and that the apparent incoherence of some of them is only a feature of our initial, superficial view of them.

Summa theologiae is the paradigm of philosophical theology. The very first Article of the very first Question makes it clear at once that it is not natural theology that *Summa theologiae* is a *summa* of, since it begins by asking whether we need any “other teaching, besides philosophical studies”, which in Aquinas's usage means the studies that medieval beginners in theology would have just completed in the arts faculty. The question arises because philosophical studies are characterized not only as dealing with “the things that are subject to reason”, but also as encompassing “all beings, including God”, as a consequence of which there is a part of philosophy that is theology.

Although Aquinas accepts this characterization of philosophy's subject matter as universal and as including a part that is properly called theology, he offers several arguments to support his claim that revealed theology is nonetheless not superfluous. In one of those arguments, he claims that a thing's “capacity for being cognized in various ways brings about a difference between sciences”. By this he means that different sciences can reason to some of the same conclusions on the basis of different premises or evidence. In his example, he points out that in order to support the proposition that the earth is round, a naturalist uses empirical observations, while a cosmologist might support that same conclusion on a strictly formal basis. He concludes:

And for that reason, nothing prevents the same things from being treated by philosophical studies insofar as they can be cognized by the light of natural reason, and also by another science insofar as they are cognized by the light of divine revelation. That is why the

INTRODUCTION

theology that pertains to *sacra doctrina* [in other words, revealed theology] differs in kind from the theology that is considered a part of philosophy.⁷¹

In this argument, Aquinas might appear willing to concede that revealed and natural theology differ only in this methodological respect, that they simply constitute two radically different ways of approaching the very same propositions about God and everything else. However, he would not actually concede this. There are propositions that belong uniquely to revealed theology's subject matter, simply because the different premises with which revealed theology begins can also lead to conclusions not available to unaided reason. And, of course, no doctrinal proposition that is initially available to human beings only in virtue of having been revealed by God can be part of natural theology's subject matter.

On the other hand, no propositions appropriate to natural theology are excluded from *ST*'s subject matter. The propositions that belong to natural theology form a proper subset of those that belong to revealed theology:

It was necessary that human beings be instructed by divine revelation even as regards the things about God that human reason can explore. For the truth about God investigated by a few on the basis of reason [without relying on revelation] would emerge for people [only] after a long time and tainted with many mistakes. And yet all human well-being, which has to do with God, depends on the cognition of that truth. Therefore, it was necessary for human beings to be instructed about divine matters through divine revelation so that [the nature of human] well-being might emerge for people more conveniently and with greater certainty.⁷²

When he sums up his examination of *sacra doctrina*, or revealed theology, Aquinas says that its "main aim ... is to transmit a cognition of God, and not only as he is in himself, but also as he is the source of things and their goal, especially of the rational creature".⁷³ Thus the subject matter of *sacra doctrina*, the theology presented in this *summa* of theology, is the most basic truths about everything, with two provisos: first, it is about God and about things other than God as they relate to God as their source and goal; second, among the things other than God with which it deals, it is especially about human beings, whose study of theology should be motivated by the fact that their well-being depends specially on their grasp of certain theological truths. And, Aquinas insists, universal scope is just what one should expect in a rational investigation of the truth about God:

All things are considered in *sacra doctrina* under the concept of God, either because they are God, or because they have an ordered rela-

tionship to God as to their source and goal. It follows from this that the subject of this science is really God

even though the intended explanatory scope of the science is universal.⁷⁴

In referring to *sacra doctrina* as a ‘science’, Aquinas means to characterize it as a systematic, reasoned presentation of an organized body of knowledge consisting of general truths about some reasonably unified subject matter. In that broadly Aristotelian sense, it is not obviously wrong to think of theology as a science (as it would be in the narrower, twentieth-century sense of ‘science’). It is in that sense that the science of theology as Aquinas develops it in *ST* would now be called philosophical theology; the enterprise of employing the techniques and devices of philosophy in clarifying, supporting and extending the propositions that are supposed to have been revealed for theology’s starting points. Thus, some of the work of philosophical theology is an attempt to explain revealed propositions and systematically work out their implications.

Like natural theology, which is subordinate to metaphysics, philosophical theology is a subordinate science. However, because it begins its work on divinely revealed propositions, Aquinas identifies the science to which it is subordinate as God’s knowledge of himself and everything else, available to human beings directly only in the afterlife.⁷⁵ As he says earlier:

For us, the goal of faith is to arrive at an understanding of what we believe – [which is] as if a practitioner of a subordinate science were to acquire in addition the knowledge possessed by a practitioner of the higher science. In that case the things that were only believed before would come to be known, or understood.⁷⁶

Not even the doctrinal mysteries are impervious to rational investigation, although unaided reason could never have discovered them. Regarding one central mystery, for example, Aquinas says: “It is impossible to arrive at a cognition of the Trinity of the divine persons by means of natural reason.”⁷⁷ However, he says this in the twenty-second of a series of seventy-seven articles of *ST* devoted to analysing and arguing about the details of Trinity, in other words, in the midst of subjecting this mystery to philosophical theology. As he explains in the very Article in which he rules out the possibility of rationally discovering that there are three divine persons:

There are two ways in which reason is employed regarding any matter ... in one way to provide sufficient proof of something fundamental ... in the other way to show that consequent effects are suited to something fundamental that has already been posited ... It is in the first way, then, that reason can be employed to prove that God is one, and things of that sort. But it is in the second way that reason is employed

INTRODUCTION

in a clarification of Trinity. For once Trinity has been posited, reasonings of that sort are suitable, although not so as to provide a sufficient proof of the Trinity of persons by those reasonings.⁷⁸

Aquinas is also careful to point out that it isn't mere intellectual curiosity or even a defense of the faith that is served by a rational clarification of Trinity. In his view, this application of philosophical theology – confirming faith by reason, showing that Trinity is not after all irrational, exposing the intricate connections between these and other doctrinal propositions – aids one's understanding of creation and salvation.