

Natural and Supernatural Modes of Inquiry: Reason and Faith in Thomistic Perspective

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“She hath sent her maids to invite to the tower. . . .” (Proverbs 9:3)

A topic of perennial interest, man’s last end has been discussed by various seminal thinkers. Both Aristotle and Augustine, for instance, have written magisterial texts on this central issue. Interestingly, the Aristotelian and Augustinian theories of happiness coincide in important respects. Both deem the contemplation of the divine as essential to human perfection. Despite such striking similarities, however, these two theories are worlds apart. Aristotelian *eudaimonia* does not clearly extend beyond this life, whereas Augustinian *beatitudo* does. A fundamental reason underlying the substantive differences between their respective theories of happiness is that Augustine was guided by the light of divine revelation. Augustine’s speculation on human finality is grounded in a distinctively Christian anthropology, an anthropology quite beyond the native range of the Stagirite’s exceptional mind.

In *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, Alasdair MacIntyre suggests a certain measure of incommensurability between the Aristotelian and Augustinian viewpoints.¹ Moreover, he proceeds to interpret Thomas Aquinas as a pivotal thinker who, relying on his sympathetic grasp of his predecessors’

¹ *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), pp. 105–26.

thought, transcended a seemingly unbridgeable chasm between the Aristotelian and Augustinian conceptual schemes. MacIntyre's fertile work merits careful reflection, but one may question whether Aristotle and Augustine held incommensurable conceptual schemes. Rather than play the incommensurability card, the faith-reason distinction seems more promising. This distinction may allow deeper insight into the Thomistic analogy of happiness, one that owes not a little to the Aristotelian and Augustinian legacies. The influence of these two intellectual giants may be observed vis-à-vis Thomas's distinction between perfect and imperfect happiness, for instance.

The fact that various commentators have offered diverse interpretations of Thomas's teaching on man's last end is hardly surprising. For if one compares the numerous Thomistic texts devoted to the question of human destiny, Thomas's thought can seem paradoxical. Some of these texts, Augustinian in inspiration, suggest that man's ultimate good cannot consist in anything short of the immediate vision of God. Other texts, more Aristotelian in tone, appear to suggest the contrary. One way to resolve this *prima facie* inconsistency would be to adopt a purely developmental approach to the relevant Thomistic passages. One might hold that Thomas gradually adjusted his understanding of man's ultimate end. Moreover, this way of resolving the apparent paradox would provide a neat solution to an important hermeneutical problem in the Thomistic synthesis. In view of the chronological proximity and interconnection of the seemingly inconsistent texts, however, a purely developmental solution to this difficult *aporia* would appear to require the admission of constant intellectual vacillation on Thomas's part, not to mention that it would sidestep the deeper philosophical issue. This dubious admission might be avoided by undertaking a chiefly metaphysical rather than historical analysis of Thomas's teaching on man's final end. The results of such an analysis will depend partly on how one construes Thomas's distinction between philosophy and theology.

In addition to that distinction, one must consider whether a certain type of hermeneutical approach to the Thomistic corpus tends to impose an unnecessary roadblock on the journey toward a more precise grasp of Thomas's seemingly inconsistent teaching on man's last end. Regarding hermeneutical approaches, one may distinguish two broad types: "externalist" and "internalist" hermeneutics. The impact of the former on Christian thought may be observed in relation to a key twentieth-century debate. This controversy involved several Catholic luminaries, including Maurice Blondel, Étienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, and Fernand Van Steenberghen. A basic question in this debate was whether the idea of Christian philosophy is an oxymoron. In my judgment, an affirmative answer to this question will be difficult to avoid

as long as an externalist hermeneutics dominates the field. Furthermore, an externalist hermeneutics inclines toward the view that Thomas remained internally divided with respect to his conception of man's ultimate destiny. It is my view that the idea of Christian philosophy properly understood is not an oxymoron, and that Thomas's teaching on man's final end was internally consistent.

In what follows, I will explore the distinction between philosophy and theology vis-à-vis a few key Thomistic texts on man's last end. In addition, I will explain and argue in favor of the superiority of internalist hermeneutics.

“[S]CIENTIA BEATA EST *QUODAMMODO* SUPRA NATURAM”

As I mentioned above, there are conflicting interpretations of Thomas's teaching on man's last end. Commentators agree that Thomas taught that man's *de facto* last end consists in the immediate vision of God. Disagreements arise, however, when considering Thomas's stance on whether unaided reason can know the possibility of this intrinsically supernatural end. Consider the following text:

The beatific vision and knowledge are in a certain manner above the nature [*supra naturam*] of the rational soul, inasmuch as it cannot reach it of its own strength; *but in another way it is in accordance with its nature, inasmuch as it is capable of it by nature, having been made to the image of God*, as stated above.²

If reason can know in principle what man is capable of *by nature*, the foregoing text would suggest that a strictly philosophical analysis of human nature *qua imago Dei* can reveal the intrinsic possibility of the immediate vision of God. Moreover, this passage is only one of several texts that might leave one with the impression that Thomas regarded the possibility of the immediate vision of God as a philosophically demonstrable truth. One's interpretation of the text in question will depend in part on one's appreciation of Thomas's conception of the different methods employed in philosophical and theological inquiry.

The distinction between philosophy and *sacra doctrina* as articulated by Thomas is clearly foreign to pagan thinkers such as Aristotle. Yet this distinction seems indispensable to an adequate grasp of Thomas's authentic teaching on man's final end. Indeed, it seems that one reason why Thomas's teaching on man's last end has been interpreted in diverse ways is that the precise line of demarcation between philosophy and (sacred) theology is not always borne in mind. To avoid misconstruing Thomas's teaching on man's last end,

² *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 9, a. 2, ad 3 (hereafter cited as *ST*). Emphasis added.

one must be clear about his understanding of the difference between human *scientia* and the divine *scientia* in which believers participate through divine faith. Thus, I now turn to examine some points relevant to Thomas's teaching on the distinction between philosophy and theology.

MAN'S FINAL END AND THOMISTIC TEXTS

As noted earlier, Thomas's understanding of man's last end is expressed in many places. In his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, for example, he argues that a spiritual creature's last end can consist in nothing less than the immediate vision of God.³ Similar reasoning is scattered throughout the Thomistic corpus.⁴ For brevity's sake I focus here on the celebrated argument found in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* as a representative sample of Thomas's thought on man's last end.

Of special interest is the fact that the reasoning set forth in *SCG* III, chap. 50 has been the object of conflicting interpretations. Some commentators have suggested that this text provides hard evidence that Thomas thought that the possibility of the immediate vision of God is a philosophically demonstrable truth. For instance, Joseph Rickaby writes:

If pure spirits and disembodied souls . . . have a natural desire . . . [for the immediate vision of the divine essence], and this natural desire . . . points to a corresponding possibility of realization; then either this vision can be attained by natural means . . . or man and angels, as such, require to be raised to the supernatural state, and could never possibly have been left by God to the mere intrinsic powers of their nature . . . making grace a requisite of nature. . . . [H]ow [does one] deliver Thomas from the dilemma? The usual escape is by saying that he writes . . . of human souls and angels . . . as they actually are in the historical order of Providence, elevated to the supernatural state. . . . But the Saint's arguments in this chapter are purely rational and philosophical, containing not the slightest reference to any fact presupposed from revelation.⁵

Since Thomas concludes this chapter with two biblical quotations (Ecclesiasticus 24:7 and Proverbs 9:3), presumably Rickaby means only that in this particular context no article of faith is an intrinsic element in Thomas's line of argument. This seemingly plausible reading of the disputed text assumes that Thomas's work contains a harmonious blend of strictly philosophical and

³ See *Summa Contra Gentiles* III, chap. 50 (hereafter cited as *SCG*).

⁴ See *Compendium theologiae* I, chap. 104; *ST* I, q. 12. In his detailed commentary on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* Thomas remarks that what Aristotle understands by man's ultimate end is equivalent in fact to imperfect beatitude.

⁵ *Of God and His Creatures: An Annotated Translation*, trans. Joseph Rickaby, S.J. (Westminster, Maryland: Carroll Press, 1950), p. 223.

properly theological reasoning. In view of Thomas's understanding of the distinction between philosophy and *sacra doctrina* and his special conception of the intimate relationship between faith and reason, however, this assumption is not easily reconciled with the acknowledged purpose of the author of the *Summa Contra Gentiles*.⁶ At the beginning of this work, Thomas avers:

And so, in the name of the divine Mercy, I have the confidence to embark upon the work of a wise man, even though this may surpass my powers, and I have set myself the task of making known, as far as my limited powers will allow, the truth that the Catholic faith professes, and of setting aside the errors that are opposed to it. To use the words of Hilary: "I am aware that I owe this to God as the chief duty of my life, that my every word and sense may speak of Him."⁷

Here Thomas explicitly indicates that he intends the writing of the *Summa Contra Gentiles* to be a *theological* endeavor. In addition, the surrounding context of the reasoning set forth in *SCG* III, chap. 50 suggests that this text is to be understood in a properly theological sense. In the *Summa Contra Gentiles* his extended line of argument on man's last end begins at *SCG* III, chap. 25. There he states the following: "And so, it is said in Matthew (5:8): 'Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God'; and in John (17:3): 'This is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God.'" Moreover, at *SCG* III, chap. 52 Thomas declares:

Thus, it is said: "The grace of God is life everlasting" (Rom. 6:23). In fact, we have shown that man's happiness, which is called life everlasting, consists in this divine vision, and we are said to attain it by God's grace alone, because such a vision exceeds all the capacity of a creature and it is not possible to reach it without divine assistance. Now, when such things happen to a creature, they are attributed to God's grace. And the Lord says: "I will manifest Myself to him" (John 14:21).

And at *SCG* III, chap. 53 Thomas argues that a spiritual creature would be altogether incapable of the immediate vision of God were it not for the supernatural light of glory.

Here one might underscore an important disagreement concerning the light of glory. It is well known that John Duns Scotus, among others, would

⁶ For one interpretation of the purpose and method of the *SCG* see Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas, Volume 1: The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), pp. 104–11. In this connection see also Anton C. Pegis's introduction to the *Summa Contra Gentiles, Book I* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 39. Likewise, James A. Weisheipl, O.P., *Friar Thomas D'Aquino: His Life, Thought and Works* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1983), p. 132.

⁷ *SCG* I, chap. 2.

not concede that the immediate vision of God is altogether impossible without the superadded *lumen gloriae*. In this connection, Efrem Bettoni, commenting on views opposed to Scotus's understanding of the proper object of the human intellect, argues thus:

From the point of view of Christian philosophy. . . . [i]f the intellect by its nature . . . cannot know anything apart from the essence of material things, it follows that as long as it keeps that nature, it will be impossible for it to know immaterial objects. In such a case, there is only one alternative: either we deny to man as such the capacity to enjoy some day the direct beatific vision of God, or we must admit that in heaven man changes his metaphysical nature. Recourse to the *lumen gloriae* is not a solution. For either the *lumen gloriae* changes the nature of our knowing faculty, and then our conclusion is granted, or it does not change it, and then the *lumen gloriae* will never be such as to confer on our intellect the capacity to know an object that in no way enters the sphere of its proper and natural object. Since both consequences are untenable, so also is the doctrine that logically leads to them.⁸

In a similar vein, Peter F. Ryan, commenting on Henri de Lubac's views concerning natural desire in relation to the idea of natural beatitude, remarks:

De Lubac, *MS*, 78, n. 16, rightly points out that the nature lacking innate desire for supernatural beatitude could be fulfilled by it only by being so profoundly altered that it would become a completely different nature. As we have noted, the same is suggested by Scotus: "[I]f knowledge of the divine essence were above the nature of our intellect, the blessed will never see God; for no potency can be elevated above its specifying object, as vision cannot be elevated to understanding. Otherwise this potency would transgress the limits of its essence, and would not remain specifically the same."⁹

In reply to the foregoing Scotistic positions, one could note that, according to Thomas's understanding of grace and the theological virtues, supernatural habits (entitative and operative) render man's nature and spiritual faculties other; however, as Thomas points out, this supernatural elevation does not necessarily imply an essential transmutation or corruption of human nature.

⁸ *Duns Scotus: The Basic Principles of His Philosophy*, trans. Bernardine Bonansea (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1961), p. 32. For a decidedly ambivalent affirmation of the *lumen gloriae* in a recent study that purports to offer a Thomist rather than Scotistic interpretation of supernatural acts, see J. Michael Stebbins, *The Divine Initiative: Grace, World-Order, and Human Freedom in the Early Writings of Bernard Lonergan*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), p. 216, and p. 354, n. 11.

⁹ Peter F. Ryan, S.J., "Moral Action and the Ultimate End of Man: The Significance of the Debate Between Henri de Lubac and His Critics," Diss. Gregorian University, Rome, 1996, p. 278, n. 10.

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Likewise, Thomas holds that the divine bestowal of the intrinsically supernatural *lumen gloriae*, a non-substantial form, does not entail a substantial transmutation of man's intellectual faculty.¹⁰ It is true that the creature's intellect is made other (*alterum*), but it is not changed specifically or numerically into another thing (*aliud*). As Thomas observes:

[A]ccidental differences make something other, while essential differences make another thing. Clearly, this otherness, which results from accidental differences, can in created beings belong to the same hypostasis or supposit, in that what is the same in number can be the subject of diverse accidents.¹¹

In part, then, the foregoing disagreement between Thomas and Scotus reflects their differing conceptions of both the theological virtues and the relationship between nature and grace.¹²

Thomas maintained that the *lumen gloriae* is strictly necessary if spiritual creatures are to participate in the divine vision. If Thomas is correct, then man's knowledge of the possibility of the divine vision as human act depends on his recognition of the superadded *lumen gloriae*. And if this special light is an intrinsically supernatural non-substantial form, then it is a divine gift that completely transcends the reach of created nature left to itself. Hence, the reality of this supernatural gift cannot be known apart from divine revelation.¹³ It will not suffice to object that man's knowledge of the possibility of the immediate vision of God requires knowledge of the light of glory not as an actual fact but as a mere possibility. For knowledge of the instrumental means, in this instance the *lumen gloriae*, is sought in view of knowledge of the desired end, in this instance the immediate vision of God. In other words, the intelligibility of the means to be used depends on the intelligibility of the end to be gained. But if the end is altogether unknown, there is no reason to inquire as to the means without which the unknown end is strictly unattainable. And in this case no strictly natural end is commensurate with the *lumen gloriae*. For Thomas, then, it appears that the very possibility of the immediate vision of God is a philosophically indemonstrable truth, a truth that necessarily eludes the noetic grasp of unaided human reason.¹⁴

If knowledge of this supernatural possibility exceeds the proper range of

¹⁰ See *SCG* III, chaps. 53–54.

¹¹ *ST* III, q. 2, a. 3, ad 1.

¹² Scotus, for instance, thought that the difference between acquired love of God and infused charity is one of degree; in contrast, Thomas held that the difference is one in kind. Also see Romanus Cessario, O.P., *Christian Faith and the Theological Life* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996), p. 4, n. 6.

¹³ See *De veritate*, q. 27, a. 2, ad 7.

¹⁴ See *De malo*, q. 5, a. 3, resp; *ST* II-II, q. 1, a. 8, resp.

unaided reason, then it might seem that unaided reason cannot but reach one of the following two conclusions: either a) spiritual creatures are endless by nature, or b) they are necessarily ordained to nothing but a proportionate final end, an end which could not possibly be other than thoroughly fulfilling. As a *Christian theologian*, Thomas would maintain that the philosophical arguments leading to either conclusion would be unsound *in the present historical order*. That is not to say, of course, that an unbeliever could not persist indefinitely in holding either a) or b) as certain.

Another indication that the reasoning employed in *SCG III*, chap. 50 is theological rather than philosophical in nature is the fact that Thomas cites the same biblical passage in both *SCG III*, chap. 50 and *ST I*, q. 1, a. 5: “[Wisdom] sent her maids [*ancillas*] to invite to the tower.”¹⁵ In the latter text he addresses the question whether *sacra doctrina* is inferior or superior to other human sciences. In an objection, he states that *sacra doctrina* appears inferior to other human sciences, since the former depends on the latter. In his reply to the same objection (ad 2), he contends that *sacra doctrina* depends on human sciences not to prove its principles, which are indemonstrable, but to render its teaching more lucid to the human mind, which stands to the mysteries of faith as “an owl’s eyes to the light of the sun.”¹⁶ And in his important commentary on Boethius’s *De Trinitate*, he defends what some of his contemporaries regarded as a “controversial” position, namely, that the reasoning of (pagan) philosophers, when applied properly, can provide invaluable service to believers engaged in sacred science.¹⁷ Given Thomas’s own interpretation of Proverbs 9:3, it seems reasonable to hold that in *SCG III*, chap. 50 he employs philosophical reasoning as an ancillary, not to demonstrate in the philosophical sense that spiritual creatures can have no final end other than the immediate vision of God, but to indicate dialectically that Christian doctrine concerning man’s ultimate end does not contradict any metaphysical principles or truths within the range of reason left to its own resources.¹⁸

¹⁵ “Misit ancillas suas vocare ad arcem” (Proverbs 9:3).

¹⁶ “[O]culus noctuae ad lumen solis” (*ST I*, q. 1, a. 5, ad 1).

¹⁷ See *In Librum Boethii de Trinitate*, ed. Decker (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), q. 2, a. 3, ad 7.

¹⁸ “This science can in a sense depend upon the philosophical sciences, not as though it stood in need of them, but only in order to make its teaching clearer [sed ad majorem manifestationem eorum quae in hac scientia traduntur]. For it accepts its principles not from other sciences, but immediately from God, by revelation. Therefore it does not depend upon other sciences as upon the higher, but makes use of them as of the lesser, and as handmaidens [*ancillis*]: even so the master sciences make use of the sciences that supply their materials, as political uses military science. That it thus uses them is not due to its own defect or insufficiency, but to the defect of our intelligence, which is more easily led by what is known through natural reason (from which proceed the other sciences) to that which is above reason, such as are the teachings of this science” (*ST I*, q. 1, a. 5, ad 2).

These considerations provide grounds for questioning the claim that the arguments proposed in *SCG* III, chap. 50 are strictly philosophical in character. Still, one might object that at *SCG* III, chap. 54 Thomas seems to confirm the view that the reasoning contained in *SCG* III, chap. 50 is purely philosophical in nature.

For these and similar reasons some men have been moved to assert that the divine substance is never seen by any created intellect. Of course, this position *both takes away true happiness from the rational creature, for it can consist in nothing other than a vision of divine substance, as we have shown, and it also contradicts the text of Sacred Scripture*, as is evident from the preceding texts. Consequently, it is to be spurned as *false and heretical*. (Emphasis added.)

Here it seems Thomas is saying that the denial of the possibility of the immediate vision of God contradicts *both* unaided reason *and* divine revelation. Why else would he distinguish here between what has been shown and what has been revealed? In reply, one could maintain that Thomas never intended the arguments in question to be interpreted as if they were altogether independent of the theological light of divine faith.¹⁹ The impact of rationalism may predispose some readers to identify the relevant arguments as strictly philosophical demonstrations. Notice, however, that the unstated assumption here appears to be that arguments proceeding from the light of faith are rationally inferior to purely philosophical demonstrations. Accordingly, if one is not among the enlightened few who grasp philosophically man's *de facto* final end, one may yet have recourse to divine revelation. This Averroistic viewpoint, however, is fundamentally opposed to the Angelic Doctor's theological vision. For Thomas, rational arguments based on divine faith, that is, theological arguments, are superior in nobility to strictly philosophical demonstrations.²⁰ Thus, even if one does not know via *sacra doctrina* that man's *de facto* final end is the immediate vision of God, nevertheless faith in God's revealed word enables one to be infallibly certain that those who deny the theoretical possibility of the immediate vision of God are mistaken. For theological faith is not a weakness but a perfection of reason.

¹⁹ "In regard then to knowledge of the truth of faith, which can be thoroughly known only to those who behold the substance of God, human reason stands so conditioned as to be able to argue some true likenesses to it: which likenesses however are not sufficient for any sort of demonstrative or intuitive comprehension of the aforesaid truth. Still it is useful for the human mind to exercise itself in such reasonings, however feeble, *provided there be no presumptuous hope of perfect comprehension or demonstration*" (*SCG* I, chap. 8). Emphasis added. See also *In Librum Boethii de Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3, resp.

²⁰ "[A]lthough the argument from authority based on human reason is the weakest, yet the argument from authority based on divine revelation is the strongest" (*ST* I, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2). See *ST* I, q. 1, a. 5.

Here I should pause briefly to stress that I am not asserting that Thomas offers no arguments accessible to unaided reason. For many of his arguments, such as his proofs of God's existence, fall within the proper epistemic range of human understanding. But the soundness of some of his arguments transcends the noetic limits of unaided reason. The metaphysical landscape as it appears to elevated reason contains dimensions imperceptible to unaided reason confronted by the very same landscape. To use a rather lame analogy, unaided reason is like a color-blind person with monocular vision, whereas elevated reason is like a person with perfect vision. The perspective of the former is less complete than that of the latter. A strictly philosophic mode of inquiry is less perfect than that of *sacra doctrina*, and certain truths made visible under the theological light of faith remain invisible under the innate light of unaided reason.

INTERPRETING METAPHORS: FROM PROFANE WATER TO SACRED WINE²¹

It seems fair to say that the Thomistic texts are luminous expressions of a believer engaged in a theological mode of inquiry, not of an unbeliever engaged in a purely philosophic mode of inquiry. Does this mean that Thomas could not employ philosophical reasoning in his theological arguments? In his *Commentary on Boethius's De Trinitate* Thomas answers an objection to the effect that anyone who mixes philosophical reasoning (symbolized by water) with sacred doctrine (symbolized by wine) corrupts the latter. In his reply he states:

It can, however, be said that a mixture is not thought to have occurred when one of two items enters into the other's nature, but when both of them are changed in their nature [*a sua natura alteratur*]. So those who use the works of the philosophers in sacred doctrine, by bringing them into the service of faith, do not mix water with wine, but rather change water into wine.²²

Commenting on this disputed text, Étienne Gilson maintains that Thomas is saying that sacred doctrine is not diluted when "mixed" with sound philosophy, for the latter is literally transformed into the former:

²¹ See R. E. Houser, "Trans-Forming Philosophical Water into Theological Wine: Gilson and Aquinas," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 69 (1995), pp. 103–16. Houser's article has proven helpful in sharpening my own ideas on this question.

²² *In Librum Boethii de Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 5.

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Can [philosophy] be thus used by theology toward ends that are not its own without losing its essence in the process? In a way *it does lose its essence, and it profits by the change*. . . . [T]heology is not a compound, it is not composed of heterogeneous elements of which some would be philosophy and the rest Scripture; all in it is homogeneous despite the diversity of origin. "Those who resort to philosophical arguments in Holy Scripture and put them in the service of faith, do not mix water with wine, they change it to wine." *Translate: they change philosophy into theology, just as Jesus changed water to wine at the marriage feast in Cana.*²³

Pace Gilson, one need not adopt his interpretation of Thomas's reply. Here I would press into service the distinction between externalist and internalist hermeneutics. An externalist hermeneutics, which refers to a certain way of approaching the written word in the search for knowledge, engenders a predisposition to treat written texts as if they were the focal point in the quest for understanding. In contrast, an internalist hermeneutics stresses the importance of *sapientes* within a living tradition, the interior activity of the intellect itself, and the cultivation of interior habits.

Now, from an externalist standpoint, Thomas's reply might mean that any passage extracted from a philosophical text loses its philosophic character the moment it is incorporated within a theological text. This reading, however, seems problematic. If the extracted passage loses its philosophic character when enveloped within a theological framework, then the original passage would not be of any service to *sacra doctrina*, since its original philosophic import would evaporate during the process of theological transplantation. Thus, philosophy would be useless to theology. But that is precisely the opinion against which Thomas argues. It would seem more tenable, then, to claim that any passage that was originally philosophic in character retains its philosophic nature, even within a strictly theological setting. This reading, however, does not seem to do full justice to Thomas's biblical metaphor.

To preserve the metaphor while retaining an externalist perspective, one might defend something like the following: A given passage can be either philosophical or theological in character depending on how it is construed by the interpreter. Thus, the same passage could be simultaneously philosophical and theological in character if one reader interprets it philosophically, while a second interprets it theologically. This proposal, however, will not persuade those who recognize that a given species of being cannot have more than one essential definition. For just as it is impossible for one and the same thing to

²³ Étienne Gilson, *The Philosopher and Theology*, trans. Cécile Gilson (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 100–01. Emphasis added.

be a lion and a lamb simultaneously, it seems impossible for one and the same text, according to its very nature, to be philosophical and theological simultaneously. Of course a lion and a lamb can belong to the same genus—animal; however, since they are different in kind, they cannot possibly have the same specific differentia. Likewise, if a philosophy text and a theology text are truly different in kind, then no given text can be both a philosophical text and a theological text at once, unless the text exists exclusively in the interpreter's mind. But in that case there would be two essentially different notions, and now the two notions would lack a single ontological ground, namely, the physical text itself. Furthermore, if the text existed exclusively in the interpreter's mind, the externalist perspective as it is here understood would be inapplicable from the very start. The preceding externalist interpretations, then, seem inadequate. Either Thomas's biblical metaphor will be ignored, or the text's ontic unity will be lost. In either case, violence is done to the text itself.

Without either sacrificing the metaphysical integrity of texts or eliding the important distinction between philosophy and sacred theology, can Thomas's metaphor be preserved? Here an affirmative response would seem less than tenable as long as one does not venture beyond the theoretical boundaries of an exclusively externalist hermeneutics. If, however, one adopts an internalist hermeneutics, a new possibility surfaces. Thomas himself supplies an internalist hint. The very article in which he employs the enigmatic scriptural metaphor to advance his own position contains another key biblical reference:

Those, however, who use philosophy in sacred doctrine can err in two ways. In one way by making use of teachings that are contrary to the faith, which consequently do not belong to philosophy but are a corruption and abuse of it. . . . In another way by including the contents of faith within the bounds of philosophy, as would happen should somebody decide to believe nothing but what could be established by philosophy. On the contrary, *philosophy should be brought within the bounds of faith, as the Apostle says in 2 Corinthians 10:5, "We take captive every understanding unto the obedience of Christ."*²⁴

When philosophy is "brought within the bounds of faith," it enters into the service of *sacra doctrina*. The quotation from 2 Corinthians, interestingly, is also cited in a later work on the very same question, namely, whether philosophical argumentation has any place in *sacra doctrina*:

²⁴ *In Librum Boethii de Trinitate*, q. 2, a. 3, resp. Emphasis added.

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Sacred doctrine makes use even of human reason, not, indeed, to prove faith . . . but to make clear other things that are put forward in this doctrine. Since therefore grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, *natural reason should subserve [subserviat] faith, just as the will's natural inclination subserves [obsequitur] charity*. Hence the Apostle says: "Bringing into captivity every *understanding* unto the obedience [obsequium] of *Christ*" (2 Cor. 10:5). Hence sacred doctrine makes use also of the authority of philosophers in those questions in which they were able to know the truth by natural reason.²⁵

According to an internalist approach, the focal point of the quest for knowledge is not some inanimate text, an historical artifact. The focal point is the truth of things, truth that resides in persons and is the proper good of human understanding. But the special truth Thomas sought about man's *de facto* last end transcends the epistemic range of unaided reason.²⁶ In this instance what human reason must receive before it can even begin the supernatural quest for the prime truth of *sacra doctrina* is the theological virtue of faith. Through divine faith man's intellect submits unconditionally to the supreme authority of Self-revealed Truth and is thereby raised to share in the truth of the mind of Christ. In serving divine Wisdom human reason is joined through faith to Christ, the incarnate Truth sought by Thomas *qua theologian*.

Philosophy and theology are not mixed in Thomas's sense of the term, since each science retains its own essential character.²⁷ If they were mixed in his sense of the term, the two would be transformed into a third type of *scientia*, a hybrid. In fact, philosophy is not transformed into something else; rather, when it subserves the revealed mysteries of faith, philosophy is subalternated to theology in the order of final causality. Yet it is not a philosophical text that is subalternated to a theological text. Strictly speaking, from an internalist standpoint, neither philosophy nor theology is a text. Whether acquired or infused,²⁸ sacred theology is principally a *habitus* that perfects the intellect. This *habitus* issues in discursive activity based on divinely revealed truths grasped only through the theological virtue of faith. Philosophy, too, represents chiefly an acquired *habitus* of human reason. In the order of formal causality, this acquired *habitus* is not subalternated to theology. When human reason is transformed qualitatively by the infused light of divine faith, its essential nature is not thereby corrupted. Human reason becomes other

²⁵ *ST I*, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2.

²⁶ See *ST I-II*, q. 109, a. 1; *ST II-II*, q. 6, a. 1.

²⁷ See Houser, "Trans-Forming Philosophical Water into Theological Wine: Gilson and Aquinas," p. 115, n. 54.

²⁸ See *ST I*, q. 1, a. 6, ad 3.

(*alterum*), but it does not become another thing (*aliud*).²⁹ Reason (nature) and divine faith (the supernatural) are not separated; they are united in the most intimate fashion. But the real distinction between reason and faith, between philosophy and *sacra doctrina* is preserved. Nature remains nature; grace remains grace.

In short, the philosophical enterprise is understood better from an internalist standpoint than from an externalist perspective. From an internalist standpoint philosophical activity is related less to the idea of philosophy *qua text* than to the idea of philosophy *qua habitus*.

If one stresses the notion of philosophy *qua habitus* (internalist standpoint) over the notion of philosophy *qua text* (externalist viewpoint), what real advantage is to be gained vis-à-vis the blending of philosophical and theological arguments such as those found in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* and similar works? *Habitus* is not its own end, but is ordered to the perfection of operation. By stressing the notion of *habitus* one can see more clearly that philosophy in its fullness is not so much a text as it is an activity. Furthermore, in comparison with the subalternation of reason to the divine Word through faith, the subalternation of one ontologically independent text to a second seems more problematic so far as integration is sought.

From an internalist standpoint, one may now proceed to distinguish four types of speculative activity and thereby grasp how philosophy and theology can be integrated without confusion. First, there are rational acts that are strictly philosophical in nature. Speculative reason's operation is strictly philosophical in character if it is the operation of unaided reason. Second, there are rational acts that are properly theological in nature. In this case one or more revealed mysteries grasped through divine faith function as principles in human reason's syllogistic activity. Third, there are rational acts that are philosophical in essence and theological by participation. In this case reason serves formally as *ancilla theologiae* without incorporating revealed mysteries as principles of syllogistic argument. This type of speculative operation seems to be the kind of activity Thomas had in mind when he employed the biblical metaphor discussed earlier. Fourth, there are rational acts that are both philosophical and Christian simultaneously. Speculative reason's operation can be both philosophical in essence and Christian in mode only if the following three conditions are satisfied: 1) the act of reasoning is enhanced by the theological virtue of faith; 2) no revealed mystery is presupposed as a principle of syllogistic argument; 3) reason is not acting *qua ancilla theologiae*, as in apologetics.

²⁹ See *ST III*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 1.

This type of speculative activity is what may be called Christian philosophizing.³⁰ The Christian character of such argumentation resides primarily not in externalized proofs recorded in physical texts but in the Christian author of the arguments. Thus, these externalized arguments could in principle be produced by unaided reason. Such arguments, then, are philosophical in essence and, in some cases at least, derive from Christian minds.

Thus, one can preserve the biblical metaphor of water and wine without either eliding the real distinction between philosophy and theology or violating the metaphysical integrity of created being, the “text” of the divine Playwright. Still, one might object from an externalist viewpoint that an internalist approach to the problem is implausible. For it seems that the historical fact of philosophical and theological texts is denied. Moreover, the denial of the historical fact of philosophical and theological texts appears inconsistent with the earlier claim that the arguments contained in *SCG* III, chap. 50 are not purely philosophical but theological, and that the *Summa Contra Gentiles* is a theological rather than a philosophical work. In reply, an internalist could affirm that no text can be identified as philosophy or theology in the primary sense. Philosophy in its fullness is primarily the intellect’s interior act of philosophizing. Similarly, theology is primarily the intellect’s interior act of theologizing. Inasmuch as they bear the mark of virtue, these acts stem from interior habits, perfections rooted in the noetic faculty. Hence, one may speak of philosophical and theological habits. An internalist can also admit, however, that printed works are philosophical or theological *per extensionem*, inasmuch as they are the visible products of philosophical or theological activity within the spiritual creature’s soul.

CONCLUSION

From an externalist perspective many expressed propositions and arguments are such that they can be interpreted as philosophical by some readers and theological by others, independently of the author’s intent. From an internalist standpoint, however, the author’s intent is central. If the author’s internal speculative activity serves formally as *ancilla theologiae*, then his rational arguments need not be considered strictly philosophical arguments capable of eliciting necessary assent from unaided reason. One misconstrues the truly rational arguments found in *SCG* III, chap. 50 and in similar

³⁰ In this connection one may cite Joseph Owens’s perspicacious remark: “[Catholic philosophy] is a kind of philosophy that is set up by the factual union of faith [the supernatural] and intelligence [the natural] in the same [created] person” (*Towards a Christian Philosophy* [Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1990], p. 111).

Thomistic texts insofar as they are interpreted as instances of pure philosophy. Those arguments are actually superior to purely philosophical arguments, for the truth of some of their premises exceed the grasp of unaided reason.

The diversity of interpretations of Thomas's expressed teaching on man's last end is, in my judgment, partly a consequence of the fact that the specific character of any given text is not inherent to the material text itself. The philosophical or theological character of human words resides in thinking subjects primarily, and in inanimate texts by extension. In subtle cases the proper interpretation of a given text, the participated meaning of the written word, can elude more than a few readers. It is to be expected, then, that readers will sometimes fail to apprehend a particular writer's actual intent, unless the text's author, or a student intimately familiar with the author's thought, is available to amend faulty interpretations.