

2. Insofar as theology is at least a negative norm of philosophy we may prudently use the theology of St. Thomas as a safe norm to test the consistency of our philosophical conclusions with revelation.

3. In the order of specification neither St. Thomas nor anyone else can possibly have any authority in philosophy.

4. For the professional student of philosophy every great philosopher has the authority of a teacher. In this sense St. Thomas has no *special* authority but he has exactly the same authority any other great philosopher has.

5. To be a Thomist in the sense that John of St. Thomas is a Thomist is an honorable way of life, quite possibly better than the philosopher's way of life. But to be a Thomist in this sense is not to be a philosopher.

JAMES V. MULLANEY

Manhattan College
New York, N. Y.

On Being Thomistic
(Commentary)

As Mr. Mullaney has so clearly said, "It must be acknowledged that for Catholics St. Thomas has a special authority in philosophy." But that the Church's statements on St. Thomas's authority in philosophy bear exclusively on philosophy as an instrument of theology and not on philosophy in itself is not so clear. It seems to me that it is one and the same philosophy that is "philosophy in itself" and "philosophy as an instrument of theology." I should find great difficulty in accepting the demonstrability of the existence of God in philosophy as an instrument of theology and yet not accept it in philosophy in itself. Could the distinction between sensitive and intellectual operation be true and certain in philosophy as an instrument of theology and yet false or uncertain in philosophy in itself? Would it not seem to be that a conclusion demonstrated by natural reason is true and certain regardless of how it is going to be used?

One's motive in learning philosophy might be to pass examinations, to make money, to feel superior to other people, or to acquire a knowledge that can in turn be used in acquiring the science of theology. But these ends are all outside the philosophical sciences. They are the *fines scientis* (ends of the scientist), and are quite distinct from the science itself as well as from the procedure necessary to acquire the science. If authority in philosophy has any meaning at all, it is as a part of the learning process necessary to acquire the philosophical sciences. If authority is necessary to learn a science, it will be necessary regardless of one's purpose in learning it.

The Church's interest in philosophy derives from her duty to protect the deposit of faith. It is concerned with philosophy not only because it will use philosophy in its theological deductions, but because some parts of philosophy are about divine things or about matters immediately relevant

to man's attaining happiness—these things are therefore connected with what is of faith. St. Paul found that it made a difference if his auditors knew that there was but one God or not. It likewise makes a very real difference if the person approaching the faith knows that the human soul is immortal, that there is a natural law, etc. Doctrines such as these are called the *praeambula fidei*. The knowledge of these natural truths disposes a man to accept divine revelation. They are purely philosophical conclusions known independently of any subsequent use in theology. But they do treat matters of vast importance which are also treated in theology, and therefore the Church insists on a philosophical approach productive of the truth about them. Philosophy here is measured by more than a negative norm.

A second important point suggests itself here, "Why should there be a master at all?" Mr. Mullaney has well said that "it is axiomatic that the master or teacher must have a certain authority in relation to the student." The reason for this axiom will have more than a little bearing on our subject. The reason is found in the very nature of man's intellect. His intellect is empty—a blank. The first propositions he comes to know are very general and confused, although certain—these are first principles. They contain other truths potentially. A teacher is necessary to lead the student to an actual knowledge of what he knew only in potency. The teacher is not merely a pointer who indicates this or that fact; he must manifest new propositions, and he must show the connection of the parts of an argumentation in order to arrive at a scientific conclusion. Whatever assent the student ultimately makes will be made because of the evident connection of a subject and a predicate, but he is brought to the point where he can make that assent by the guidance of his teacher. It is not difficult to see that the choice of teacher is a crucial one, for the student will want to be led to the truth. The great problem for the student is where to find a teacher who will actually lead him to a knowledge of truth. With no master, the student will have small chance of learning the truth. With a poor master, he will be even worse off. It is easy to see from our own experience that the student does choose a master—even if it is only H. G. Wells. What criterion can he use? He cannot judge the master's competence, because the student is ignorant of the science. He knows nothing from which to judge. He will make his judgment from some extrinsic sign—such as the master's reputation. It is at this point that help from outside the student's own ignorance is needed, and it is precisely in this all-important matter of choosing a master in philosophy that we are fortunate to have the teaching authority of the Church providing us with a reliable master—St. Thomas. This is a tremendous advantage, for we can begin and proceed with confidence that we are headed in the right direction. As loyal members of the Church we accept St. Thomas's leadership in philosophy on faith—ecclesiastical faith, but we assent to philosophical propositions only because of evidence. What we accept by our assent to the Church's declarations is exactly that St. Thomas is the master from whom we learn the philosophical sciences. The point is that he is

the one that the Church in her wisdom gives us as a guide so that we will actually arrive at evident scientific conclusions.

A third important point is a question of fact, "What has the Church said?" That the Church demands consent on this as well as other matters taught in the encyclical letters was made clear in *Humani Generis*:

Nor must it be thought that what is expounded in Encyclical Letters does not of itself demand consent, since in writing such Letters the Popes do not exercise the supreme power of their Teaching Authority. For these matters are taught with the ordinary teaching authority, of which it is true to say: "He who heareth you, heareth me" [NCWC translation, paragraph 20.]

The teachings found in the encyclicals demand our consent but not necessarily by divine faith, i.e., the Church is not saying that they are contained in divine revelation. The teachings of the encyclicals are without error and demand consent because the Church is guaranteed the guidance of the Holy Ghost in whatever is necessary to carry out its mission in the world. The Holy Father seems to be taking special pains to clarify and emphasize the authority of the encyclicals. Besides divinely revealed truths, what is contained in the encyclicals is either a theological conclusion which the Church herself draws from divinely revealed principles or something else intimately connected with the truths of faith and hence necessary for carrying out the Church's mission. The guidance of the Holy Ghost most certainly extends to these matters.

That the Church in fact insists on teaching the philosophy of St. Thomas is so evident from the many pronouncements of the last several centuries that it is difficult to understand the reluctance to comply that seems to be so general. In *Humani Generis*: the Church demands instruction

in philosophy 'according to the method, doctrine, and principles of the Angelic Doctor,' since, as we well know from the experience of centuries, the method of Aquinas is singularly preeminent both for teaching students and for bringing truth to light; his doctrine is in harmony with divine revelation, and is most effective both for safeguarding the foundation of the faith, and for reaping, safely and usefully, the fruits of sound progress. [*Ibid.*, paragraph 31.]

Or again in *Humani Generis*:

It is well known how highly the Church regards human reason, for it falls to reason to demonstrate with certainty the existence of God, personal and one; to prove beyond doubt from divine signs the very foundations of the Christian faith; to express properly the law which the Creator has imprinted in the hearts of men; and finally to attain to some notion, indeed a very fruitful notion, of mysteries. But reason can perform these functions safely and well, only when properly trained, that is, when imbued with that sound philosophy which has long been, as it were, a patrimony handed down by earlier Christian ages, and which moreover possesses an authority of even higher order, since the Teaching Authority of the Church, in the light of divine revelation itself, has weighed its fundamental tenets, which have been elaborated and defined little by little by men of great genius. For this philosophy, acknowledged and accepted by the Church, safeguards the

genuine validity of human knowledge, the unshakable metaphysical principles of sufficient reason, causality, and finality, and finally the mind's ability to attain certain and unchangeable truth. [*Ibid.*, paragraph 29.]

If all great philosophers have the same authority, how can the student know which path to follow, since one master says that the existence of God is demonstrable and another says it is not, one master says God is personal and another says He is not, one master says man is able to attain certain and unchangeable truth and another says he cannot? Who is to be the student's guide? Could it be that all of these great philosophers who hold contradictory views are equally good teachers and therefore enjoy equal authority?

A particularly explicit statement is to be found in a *Motu Proprio* issued by Pius X in 1914. [A.A.S., pp. 336-341. The translation is my own.] It is in fact an authentic interpretation of a previous pronouncement made in 1910 in which he repeated the decrees of Leo XIII concerning the philosophy of St. Thomas:

But since we said in that place that *particularly* the philosophy of Aquinas must be followed, and not *uniquely*, some people have persuaded themselves that they are obedient to Our will or are not certainly violating it, if they indiscriminately follow what was taught by some other scholastic Doctor in philosophy even though this teaching is repugnant to the principles of St. Thomas. But they have grossly deceived themselves. It is plain that when we give Thomas as the particular leader of scholastic philosophy to our people we intend this to be understood most of all of his principles on which, as on its foundation, the philosophy itself relies. For that opinion formerly held by some must be rejected, namely, that it is of no interest to the truth of Faith what anyone thinks about created things, provided he thinks correctly about God; the reason for this is that error about the nature of things produces false knowledge of God; so the principles of philosophy established by Aquinas must be maintained in a respectful and inviolate manner, by which [principles] (1) such science of created things is arrived at which most thoroughly agrees with the Faith; (2) all errors of all ages are refuted; (3) we can know with certitude what can be attributed to God alone and never to anything else; (4) both the difference and the similarity between God and His works are wonderfully illustrated.

Whatever is of primary importance in the philosophy of St. Thomas cannot be regarded as being of the order of opinion about which one is permitted to argue for either side, but such things are as foundations on which all science of natural and divine things is built.

I should find it difficult to reconcile the papal decrees with the view that St. Thomas has exactly the same authority as any other scholastic philosopher—much less any non-scholastic philosopher. Is the Church just making traffic regulations about which it will change its mind tomorrow? I think not, for Pius XII has said, "Truth and its philosophic expression cannot change from day to day." [*Humani Generis*, paragraph 30.]

Lastly, I certainly want to join Mr. Mullaney in his condemnation of the two extremes he cites—that of cultural relativism which regards phi-

losophy not as true or false but as an examination of different sets of opinions in their historical settings; also of that extreme which regards a quotation from St. Thomas as a substitute for the student's own thought. However, I do not think that John of St. Thomas touches this second extreme. My reading of John of St. Thomas has not been exhaustive, but I recall no place where he merely cites a teaching of St. Thomas without giving reasons which establish the truth of that teaching. He may find the reasons in the writings of St. Thomas, but he uses them because they prove the point under discussion—not simply because some one said so. There is another danger allied to the substitutional extreme that I should like to point out. It is the use of St. Thomas not as a guide to learning philosophy, but rather in an attempt to substantiate one's own opinions. It seems to me that this tendency can do more to hinder the learning of Thomistic philosophy than possibly any other. We find it in the man who writes a book or an article expressing some view of his own—possibly a well founded one. Then, wishing to gain the authority of St. Thomas for his view, he quotes passages from the works of St. Thomas to justify his opinion—even though, in many cases, the passages are quoted out of context, or they are passages in which St. Thomas is speaking of something else, or perhaps the author is merely quoting words that happen to be similar to his own even though he does not really understand them. Such a man is not a disciple of St. Thomas, nor is he a philosopher.

In concluding, I might summarize this commentary by saying that submission to the guidance of a master in learning the philosophical sciences is not only not opposed to the freedom of the human intellect, but is even demanded by the human intellect in order to attain its end. In learning a science we do in fact choose a master. The Church guarantees that this master is a good one when after long centuries of experience and guidance by the Holy Ghost she gives us St. Thomas as our guide and master in the difficult task of learning the philosophical sciences.

HENRI DULAC

College of St. Thomas
St. Paul, Minn.

HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY DIVISION: MARY L. BRADY, *Chairlady*.

Problem (a): The Function of Faith in the Ontological Argument

The *ontological argument* has given rise to heated disputes from its very inception. But while the early objectors centered their attack on what they considered the purely conceptual character of the demonstration, more recent critics have encountered a stumbling block in Anselm's insistence on the necessity of faith for the successful conclusion of the argument. This need of faith could hardly be couched in more emphatic terms than those found at the end of the first chapter of the *Proslogium*: