

FATHER D'ARCY'S THOMAS AQUINAS*

THE inclusion of a monograph on St. Thomas in the 'Leaders of Philosophy' series is significant of the growing strength of the Thomist revival. Even in England, later than in the rest of Europe, St. Thomas is now coming to be considered as taking rank among the philosophers who have mainly influenced western thought; with Leibniz, Spinoza, Berkeley, Kant. Father Knox's Lady Denham, with her 'Sir Thomas *who?*' after the game of ghosts, is a type already growing uncommon.

Perhaps there is no one in this country better qualified than Father D'Arcy to give an acceptable statement of St. Thomas's thought. A high and dry Thomist can cut an awkward figure in modern philosophical society. Father D'Arcy is never that; his manner is always tactful, indeed at times even deprecatory. He is inclined to present a Thomist certitude almost hat in hand, as when he says that the problem of the One and the Many receives 'an attempted explanation in the metaphysics of St. Thomas. By an employment of his fundamental distinctions and what he calls analogy he tries to find a *via media*' (p. 109). Still, a wedge cannot be driven in thick end first, and it is possible that Thomists in the past have not been sufficiently ingratiating. And there can be little doubt that Father D'Arcy has also entered well into the spirit of his subject, and has written a book profitable even to the practised Thomist; something better than a list of theses strung together and described from outside; a synthesis showing a real insight into St. Thomas's thought and the meaning of the principles of act and potency, of analogy, and of knowledge.

*THOMAS AQUINAS. By the Rev. M. C. D'Arcy, S.J., M.A. (London: Benn; 8vo., pp. ix, 292; 12/6.)

Father D'Arcy's St. Thomas Aquinas

There are many illuminating observations which bear witness to this insight; the remark (p. 16) that St. Thomas made no attempt to make science cover all modes of cognition is typical; and again, the suggestion that St. Thomas, save by an oversight, does not apply the term *ens* but *quo ens* to the internal constituents of created being is eloquent to the student who regrets that verbal inheritance from Boethius, the *quod* of essence.

We find the genuine mind of St. Thomas in the book, although the manner is not always that of a right wing Thomist, as the author would say. He discusses briefly the various schools within the movement. Yet in truth the divisions are more apparent than real; the difference between Louvain, say, and Freiburg more of manner than of thought; and not only in the Convention are there Jacobins on the Mountain. The real distinction of essence and existence within Being is the fundamental test of orthodoxy, and some of the so-called 'liberals' are not really Thomists at all, or only in patches, which amounts to the same thing. You cannot be an eclectic and genuinely profess a simple synthesis, although you may talk the language, and seem in the swim. The precise constitutive of personality can be debated within the system, or the need urged of a greater emphasis on the immediate perception of the real; but certain necessary conclusions, such as the intrinsic physical premotion of everything by God, or a fundamental conception, such as the real distinction already alluded to, cannot be denied or restricted. As Father D'Arcy admits, this latter is recognised as the vertebral column of the Thomist system; 'the Thomist *sans peur et sans reproche* takes this distinction and applies it rigorously; it becomes the shibboleth separating the true from the false follower. Excellent as this method is, I have not used it because it pre-supposes

Blackfriars

a knowledge of St. Thomas which readers may not all possess' (p. 66). This is quite defensible, and good sense in dealing with an audience inclined to dislike a universal principle which seems, as it is sometimes presented, rather too slick. From hints here and there, however, his personal soundness can be recognised, and his insistence on the diversity within Being leaves little to be desired, although, of course, it cannot logically be sustained without an entitative composition. But half a loaf is better than no bread.

The book is divided into three parts, namely the background of St. Thomas's thought, the thought itself, and its subsequent history. The historical background is given in an able piece of compression—St. Louis, by the way, died in Tunis and not in the Holy Land (p. 7); the philosophical background by comparison seems somewhat sketchy. Augustinianism is justly indicated, but Averrhoism hardly comes in for its fair amount of attention. After a short life of the saint, Father D'Arcy in an attractive essay gives the personal background of his thought, an appreciation of his character which corrects the impression of a rather bovine recluse fostered by many paintings of him and by the extraordinary detachment of his thought from any environment or mood; a trait of his writings which, in Father D'Arcy's opinion, makes for dull reading. 'His silence almost makes itself felt in his writing' (p. 38). It is true that our generation is more interested in personalities than ideas. But by blood and temper St. Thomas was lordly and fearless, his mind direct and quietly humorous—*stylus brevis, grata facundia; celsa, clara, firma sententia*, says his office—his human affections strong, and he was reckoned shrewd enough by his contemporaries for them to turn to him for help; his brethren in the organisation of the Order, novices in their reli-

Father D'Arcy's St. Thomas Aquinas

gious life, and rulers in affairs of state. Almost the last thing he had in hand was a treatise on aqueducts.

The second part gives a good account of St. Thomas's philosophy in chapters on his theory of knowledge, the nature of reality, the existence and nature of God, God and the universe, Nature and man, and ethics. Both its rationalism and originality, the qualities which chiefly struck his contemporaries, are well brought out. The old idea of St. Thomas as a co-ordinator of other men's thought disappears when one penetrates beyond his literary self-effacement behind the great names of tradition to his fresh and personal position. 'As a Vergil could copy Homer and keep his genius and his reputation, so a medievalist could veil his thought under great Greek names' (p. 22). A Thomist can quite imaginably feel uncomfortable when he is called an Aristotelian.

As for his rationalism, 'St. Thomas would prefer to be read as a Christian philosopher, but he is prepared to stand the test on his philosophy alone' (p. 30); just as a great work of religious art may be a great work of pure art as well, so St. Thomas, although he is first of all a great Catholic theologian, has a philosophy which some have considered almost too rigidly rational; a rational philosophy, moreover, which is essentially independent of the outworn scientific theories of his age. Indeed his description of a scientific theory or hypothesis as something provisional designed to explain appearances, or, in modern language, a principle imposed by a science to render its current experimental laws logically necessary, is an anticipation of some of the modern critique of science, and can be paralleled from Poincaré, Duhem and de Broglie. 'It would be too much to assert that he always kept the provinces of science and philosophy clear,' says Father D'Arcy (p. 57). But would it? It is true that there is a certain amount of medieval

Blackfriars

science in his writings, and that arguments are sometimes attached to queer bits of science, but they are always seen for what they are worth. Nobody could ever have taken very seriously the argument that the dove has no gall, and therefore fittingly represents the gift of piety which preserves us from irrational anger and so on. After all, St. Thomas was writing for a definite public, and his thought naturally seeks the analogies it would appreciate; they were not exactly 'stop-gaps' (p. 57); symbolical arguments were an accepted literary convention, just a light sort of suggestion, used in much the same way as Father D'Arcy commends his subject nowadays by examples from Donne and Bach. They are interesting if St. Thomas is approached as a literary man or a scientist, not as a philosopher; the distinction of his philosophy from his science is clear, and nobody, for instance, should be held up by the *maxime calidum* of the *Quarta Via*.

On the epistemological question, there is an ambiguous paragraph on philosophic doubt which questions the existence for St. Thomas of only one first indubitable truth, and contrasts, not very clearly, his position with that of Descartes (p. 75). If the Cartesian doubt was merely methodological, as it may well have been, then it does not seem very different as a premise from that hinted at by St. Thomas in the *Metaphysics*. There is this difference, of course, that in his view the fundamental truth into which all others are reduced, although it is barren as a principle from which fresh truths can be deduced, is not the ego, but the principle of the affirmation of Being. This principle of identity is truly synthetic (in the post-Kantian sense of the word) in virtue of the implied nexus of necessity, even if it is lowered from the order of Being into that of 'tality,' and stated, as it sometimes is, as the identity of x and x . St. Thomas,

it is true, is not preoccupied with the problem of knowledge associated with the modern names of realist and idealist, *das sogenannte Erkenntnisproblem* as it now seems to some. The philosophical difficulty at any rate is wrongly stated by the spatializing imagination overstressing the preposition in the question: are there things outside me?

St. Thomas's realism is something deeper than the American neo-realism, its foundation is metaphysical, not physical. As Father D'Arcy says, 'it belongs to a much later generation to ask the question, how can I pass from the logical order of content of experience to the real? No such question vexes St. Thomas. In his view the bridge is crossed in every affirmation' (p. 80). Being, at this stage, is not considered as spatially existing outside the mind, or, for that matter, as a submetaphysical fact or experience. It is true that Father D'Arcy briefly indicates that first principles must be the laws of reality as well as of mind, but in these days a more profound investigation, such as he so well gives of the union of knower and known in the act of knowledge, of the 'otherness' found in its first act would have been welcome.

And although the perfection of reality in mind is well brought out, we should have welcomed too a well explained distinction between real and conceptual knowledge. The pedestrian course of concept, judgment, and proof is by no means the pattern of knowledge as such, but part of the often irksome limitations of the present state of the human mind. The mind yearns for something more immediate and total, but, inadequate as this course is to satisfy the natural desire of the mind for complete reality, it is nevertheless true, and in fact concerned with the only form of truth we can talk about. The rationalism of St. Thomas is not the sort so badly damaged by Bergson. Only in the judgement is scientific truth properly

Blackfriars

found, and error incidentally, for the mind is not deceived in taking the elements of its thought, but only in arranging them. This conclusion of the neo-realists is formally stated by St. Thomas. His teaching on the *species intelligibilis* is well treated of, and insistence laid on the fact that it is not a copy or photograph of a thing, but a living relation to it. It is always necessary to remember that for St. Thomas knowledge and reality are not two parallel orders, but one is the perfection of the other, so that there are Thomists who make Subsisting Knowledge the metaphysical keynote of the divine nature; knowledge is the perfection of life, of immanent activity.

Father D'Arcy recognises that the thesis of matter and form does not precede that of potency and act in the metaphysics of St. Thomas, but he does not bring out its strict metaphysical character as the only explanation of univocal substantial perfection, that is of numerical individuation within an order of essence. Essence needs interior co-efficients if it is to be multiplicable, just as Being does. When the need of postulating matter and form is rather confusedly stated as the need of rendering intelligible the objects of experience by a composition of potency and act, it is not surprising to learn that 'it is not easy to be certain of St. Thomas's mind, and it is to be regretted that there is no definitive passage on this subject' (p. 110). This may be true as regards the subsequent question as to the precise principle of individuation, quantified matter, but on the central need of potency and act within an essence to explain its multiplication without specific differentiation there are texts definitive enough.

Father D'Arcy states that the real distinction of essence and existence is borrowed by St. Thomas from Avicenna, and explains it accordingly. It is true that Père Roland-Gosselin establishes some sort of con-

nection between them, but he also shows the important difference; that St. Thomas regards *esse* as only logically or by prediction accidental to substance, and does not endorse Avicenna's de-essentialisation of the Necessary. This spoils Father D'Arcy's exposition of the subject, in that it tends to identify existence with factualisation. The distinction should have been lifted to its native metaphysical level, and given its proper, and at the same time easier, proof by the application of the principle that no transcendental perfection can limit itself. Essence in this context is not so much the specific perfection of a thing, as its potential entitative perfection.

The author has some wise words on substance. He points out that the Kantian dichotomy between phenomena and noumenon is not St. Thomas's distinction between accidents and substance; substance is not primarily that which underlies accidents, but a self-subsistent being expressed by them, while it 'preserves appearances' (p. 122), it is not unaffected by changes in them. The easy antitheses, Appearance and Reality, Knowledge and Nature, Body and Soul, and the others, are absent from St. Thomas.

Substantial pluralism is approached in the section on analogy, where there is a courageous tackling of the question. The author is prepared to leave the analogy of so-called intrinsic attribution, and hold to the usual Thomist explanation of analogy of proportionality as our means, true if only a makeshift, of reaching to a knowledge of God. Canning's squibs give us a better historical notion of Addington in the famous couplet 'Pitt is to Addington as London is to Paddington'—a good case of proportionality—than in the description of the Prime Minister as 'happy Britain's guardian gander,' for in the first, the significance is intrinsic to both terms. The philosopher is properly concerned with intrinsic properties, not ex-

trinsic denominations. Analogies, other than those of strict proportionality, are literary methods of approach rather than metaphysical.

But while the difficulties have not been shirked, the section on analogy cannot be called a good piece of exposition. The natural difficulty of the subject has been needlessly increased by a start from a text in the Commentary on the Sentences when there are much easier texts from St. Thomas's maturity. Moreover this text is not happily translated, for '*secundum diversum esse*' is rendered 'according to different modes of existence' (p. 125); the quotation must be read to appreciate how much this hinders the thought. The whole section—as also the chapter on ethics—would have gained by a more elementary treatment, and had the main distinction of the *de Analogia* of Ramirez, for example, been followed and briefly worked out, there would have been no loss of depth. Still even this is a sign that Father D'Arcy is working at the mind of St. Thomas himself, and not fobbing us off with an easily imagined collection of formulae. Without invoking the real distinction of essence and existence, there is a valuable attempt to indicate the analogy and pluralism of Being. And there is the synthetic ending of the section, 'analogy is nothing more than a restatement of act and potency in the light of the concept and predication' (p. 133). The whole book gives the impression of a real synthesis of thought, not just the regimentation of images sometimes mistaken for it. The approach, for instance, to the object of metaphysics is excellent; indeed the reviewer in the current *Dublin* thinks Father D'Arcy 'dare we say clearer than St. Thomas' on this point, permitting himself a piece of quaint phantasy to the effect that St. Thomas confuses abstract minimal being (*ens commune*, the object of metaphysics) and the fulness of Being which is God. The distinction, of course, is an

elementary part of St. Thomas's natural theology, explicit in his writings.

The author, on the whole, preserves a fine balance of critical appreciation, but as is almost inevitable there are occasional lapses from it. Remarks are made here and there, for which no justification is offered. The conception of St. Thomas as 'one who is coldly indifferent to the world of emotions and imagination except in so far as they subserve a metaphysical account of reality' (p. 60) is overstrained. St. Thomas as an intellectualist is certainly out to affirm constituents, but not to exclude concomitants; his thought can never be called bleak; and besides, there are whole passages and pages, notably in the *Secunda Pars*, which bear witness to a most lively and acute psychological observation. St. Thomas is better found in his writings than in modern French systematisations of his thought. Nor is it true 'that at times he set too much store by his abstractions, that he neglected experience' (p. 61); the experience, that is, available to him, for it stands to reason that the latest laboratory apparatus was not at his disposal. Indeed, some of the difficulty in reading him, as Father D'Arcy elsewhere emphasises, lies in dissociating his experience from his metaphysics, with which it is but incidentally connected. The scholastics are often taunted with pushing out into science from certain *a priori* categories, but the process is not very different from the modern scientific one of discovery by hypothesis, which is legitimised by success. The medievals also had their scientific successes. These have been superseded, as ours may be; but the method remains the same. Not only the matter, but also the method of science is discontinuous. It proceeds in a series of hops called hypotheses, of which some are better than others, some lead in the wrong direction, but all are provisional. Decadent scholastics certainly clung to outworn phy-

Blackfriars

sical theories long after they had outstayed their welcome and invested them with a fictitious philosophical value, but this is not peculiar to them, and Doctor Azzeca-Garbugli is a common enough type in every profession and period. St. Thomas, however, is primarily a philosopher; his physical science, like his literary expression, is chiefly of biographical interest, and even for the period, it cannot compare with that of his master, Albert the Great. A history of the scientific work of the middle ages could be written without mentioning him.

The angels, which are treated of by St. Thomas in a masterpiece of sustained metaphysical thinking, are said to 'gather up in their explanation a strange mingling of Christian, Platonic and Aristotelian traditions' (p. 116). This is all the more surprising because the author more than once writes so well of the simultaneous self-possession by nature and knowledge of subsisting forms or pure spirits, and of the hierarchy of Being scaling down by the law of dissipation and concentration, as it is well called (p. 149), from pure act to potentiality, through the partially realised immanent life of man.

Despite the *Quaestiones Disputatae de Spiritualibus Creaturis* and *de Anima*, he does not know of any place where St. Thomas tries to reconcile the existence of a spiritual life in man with its individuation by matter, or any recognition of the difficulty (p. 150). And there is the gratuitous and unsupported observation that 'St. Thomas probably tends to exaggerate the influence of heredity, of temperament and bodily dispositions on human character and conduct' (p. 205).

Again, of our analogical knowledge of God: 'St. Thomas took over the generally accepted solution and made it more general and scientific. That does not mean that his view is always consistent or free from

difficulty' (p. 125). There are difficulties, and commentators may not be unanimous always in their interpretations; but lack of consistency . . . ? This is an unnecessary sop to Cerberus. Nor was St. Thomas inconsistent, as the author makes Rousselot declare, 'with his dearest principles when advocating the Aristotelian ideal of abstract definition' (p. 273). It is not inconsistent to place the ideal of knowledge at immediate vision while at the same time affirming the present necessity of definition and demonstration, which is in a lower grade of knowledge.

Father D'Arcy gives an interesting summary of the later history of Thomism, noting the age of little men that followed the death of Scotus; the great names of Ferrariensis and Cajetan on the eve of the Reformation; the counter Reformation revival which produced John of St. Thomas, perhaps the greatest of St. Thomas's followers, and Vittoria, whose position as the founder of international law is beginning to be recognised; the period of cloistered ecclesiastical obscurity; and the Leonine revival, which is still a flowing tide in world philosophy. It was a tragedy from which we are still suffering that western thought from the time of Descartes to our own proceeded practically uninfluenced by St. Thomas. And one cannot help thinking that his followers were greatly to blame. But the unity of a Catholic civilisation had been broken, and philosophy and theology went their different ways with advantage to neither, and, as Father D'Arcy says, 'the philosophy of St. Thomas came to be treated as the *Times Literary Supplement* treats a religious tract, that is, it was put under a special heading with the briefest statement of its contents' (p. 259). Nowadays at any rate St. Thomas is taken to stand for something immeasurably deeper than a crabbed scholasticism. His thought has left the folios and is found in the reviews, and to be a Thomist is almost becoming a

Blackfriars

vogue. True, the *Dublin* may be sometimes supercilious, and the Thomism half-baked.

The term Thomist applied to a holder of the *scientia media* (p. 187) is presumably used in a Pickwickian sense, since English dictionaries give the term Molinist; and there is a certain naiveness in the saying that Suarez was the 'author of a system based on similar principles to those of St. Thomas' (p. 256). How similar will be seen in the *Ciencia Tomista* (May-June, 1917), where twenty-four theses, officially accepted as representing the authentic teaching of St. Thomas, are neatly opposed by twenty-four theses from Suarez flatly denying them. About the only likeness between St. Thomas and Suarez is that both happened to be Catholics and both used a somewhat similar medium of expression.

There are slips here and there: the professor of Thomist philosophy at Ghent University is not a religious, 'P. de Bruyne' (p. ix); finite being, not Being itself, is unintelligible without the notion of Cause (p. 67); a scientist could be a Spinozan and yet treat of plants and animals without reference to God, for an admitted pluralism in the order of phenomena may go with a metaphysical monism (p. 69). St. Thomas's idea of all things as absolutes in their own way rests on his conception of Being, and the pluralism within it explained by the distinction of essence and existence. We should like the author's reference for the statement attributed to St. Thomas, but contrary to his teaching in his analysis of the act of faith in the *de Veritate*, that 'in all natural acts whenever the mind is influenced by the will there is only opinion or probability, not certainty' (p. 267).

References for the frequent and apt quotations from St. Thomas are generally not given, and this is tantalising, for the reader must often wish to go to the text itself. At times the translations seem obscure or

Father D'Arcy's *St. Thomas Aquinas*

inaccurate; thus, God is spoken of as 'outside being' (p. 187); St. Thomas says '*extra ordinem entium*,' which is quite another thing.

The book is well printed. The reviewer noticed only one typographical mistake of importance; surely 'divided' should be 'undivided' (foot of p. 109), and there is a false reference (p. 177).

Our chief general criticism is the frequent deficiency in exposition which, while it goes with an undoubted power of synthesis, would seem to make the book more useful to the initiated Thomist than to the outsider. Too much is stated without explanation; artificial difficulties are started or badly stated (p. 86); domestic controversies of the school are opened up when the space perhaps would have been filled more profitably by direct exposition; questions are better approached than decided.

This picking out of defects is an ungracious task in face of the debt of gratitude which Father D'Arcy has laid on us by what is certainly a valuable contribution to the revival of St. Thomas. And these criticisms, which only exceed our praise in quantity, could easily be rendered void without many corrections in a later edition of what is, in its way, a triumph recalling that of *l'Intellectualisme de saint Thomas* by another member of the Society. Père Rousselot, whose loss in the war—as of others, de Poulpiquet for instance, its Grenfells and Sorleys—the Thomist movement must still feel. By no means the least merit of the book is the outline of St. Thomas's thought in a living synthesis of nature and mind; a metaphysics which is not the neat ordering of concepts—the Dutch interior Mr. Bertrand Russell once took it to be—but a real relation with things; fragmentary and detached by the limitations under which the mind at present works, but not on that account untrue; prone, perhaps, to distort; but always aspiring to that perfect union with all that is

Blackfriars

real in the face to face vision of the Absolute, of which our present self-sensation provides some anticipation. Father D'Arcy's work abounds in good things, and if we began to quote, this review would swell to a book quite half the size of his.

THOMAS GILBY, O.P.

YOUTH AND AGE

WHEN the enkindled heavens are bright
Gutters the candle in the night;
And the soul trembles in the gloom,
Because his guardian angel's come
To take the homeless home.

Unkind was earth and black and cold,
And a man wears weary, wearing old—
Why should he feel it hard to die?
But only the young contented sigh
Their last on the bosomed sky,

The young with all their passion fresh
And incandescent in the flesh,
They—and the happy aged who
Grow young as night falls and the dew,
Grow young in God anew.

THEODORE MAYNARD.