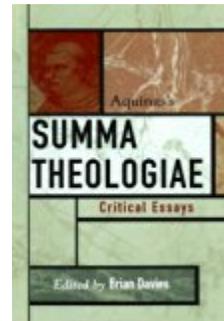


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Brian Davies, ed. *Aquinas's Summa Theologiae: Critical Essays*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006. xix + 270 pp. \$87.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7425-4342-3; \$30.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7425-4343-0.

Reviewed by Robert Delfino (Department of Philosophy, St. John's University)
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A Philosophical Summary of the *Summa Theologiae*

Few secondary sources focus exclusively on the *Summa Theologiae* of Saint Thomas Aquinas; and of those that do, none of them, to my knowledge, investigate it solely from a philosophical point of view. For example, Edward J. Gratsch's book, *Aquinas's Summa: An Introduction and Interpretation* (1985), was written more for students of the theology than for philosophers; and Jean-Pierre Torrell's book, *Aquinas's Summa: Background, Structure, and Reception* (2005), is more historical in its approach, spending a good deal of time on Aquinas's Christian, Greek, Jewish, and Arab sources. Brian Davies, however, has remedied this situation by collecting eleven essays, written by a group of distinguished scholars, into a single volume that covers "the key philosophical positions defended by Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae*" (p. xiii). In doing so, he has produced a useful tool for contemporary philosophers interested in Aquinas.

The order of the essays is based on the first two parts of the *Summa Theologiae* itself. The third part is not covered because, as I alluded to earlier, Davies's goal is to "look at the philosophy in the *Summa* by focusing on sections of the work in which Aquinas is not dealing with uniquely Christian notions" (p. xii). Thus three of the first five chapters of Davies's book examine God, the next four chapters cover anthropology, and the last two chapters focus on morality. With the exception of a short introduction, written by Davies himself, none of these essays were newly written for the book. In fact, four of them are twenty-five years old, or older, and only three

of them were written within the last five years. This, combined with the introductory character of many of the chapters, makes it clear that the book is primarily intended for newcomers to Aquinas and not specialists, who, in all likelihood, have already read these essays and are familiar with much of the content.

So, does the book succeed as an introductory text? On the positive side, the chapters are generally clear and well written and they often bring Aquinas's thought into dialogue with contemporary philosophy and science. Let me highlight a few examples concerning science first. In chapter 2, Victor White replies to several common objections to Aquinas's five ways of proving God's existence and in the course of doing so explains the important differences between Aquinas's five ways and William Paley's watchmaker argument. This, no doubt, will be of interest to those following the intelligent design movement. In chapter 3, John Wippel, at length and meticulously, examines each of the five ways. When discussing the first way he spends a few pages considering it in light of objections based on the principle of inertia in modern physics. Finally, in chapter 6, Robert Pasnau gives a lengthy and detailed discussion of the substantial unity of body and soul, briefly noting some of the problems that modern chemistry poses for Aquinas's views on substance.

With respect to contemporary philosophical issues, in chapter 9 Eleonore Stump gives an excellent account of Aquinas's views on human freedom that will cer-

tainly be of interest to those following contemporary discussions of compatibilism and libertarianism. In chapter 11, Fergus Kerr examines different and incommensurable readings of Aquinas's views on natural law and morality, discussing how different groups of contemporary philosophers and theologians have tried to appropriate Aquinas's theory. Finally, in chapter 4, Peter Geach attempts to explain Aquinas's real distinction between form and existence using the resources of analytic philosophy, especially the work of Gottlob Frege.

The book is not, however, without its faults. There are inconsistencies in style and the continuity between chapters is not as smooth as it could be. For example, some understanding of the doctrine of analogy is presupposed in the second chapter, yet the doctrine of analogy is not explained until the fifth chapter. Because the chapters were taken from different sources, this is understandable. However, the inclusion of an index would have at least partially alleviated this problem and would have also been helpful given the fact that readers will be tempted to peruse only the chapters that interest them since the chapters are arranged topically.

Also helpful would have been the inclusion of a short glossary of key terms, along the lines of what Peter Kreeft did in his book, *A Summa of the Summa* (1990). Aquinas uses many of Aristotle's terms in addition to his own technical terms, and the chapters of Davies's book often contain these in both English and Latin. Davies is aware of the problem, and in his introduction he warns the reader that "Aristotle's teaching on substance, form, accidents, matter, act, and potentiality ... is not easily summarized, and I shall not attempt to expound it here" (p. xiii). In a later endnote he refers the reader to three secondary sources. Nevertheless, since Davies's book is aimed at newcomers to Aquinas, adding a glossary and an index would greatly increase its usefulness. I recommend the inclusion of both should a second edition be produced.

Whereas the above faults are minor, there is, in my estimation, one very serious flaw in the book. Except for a handful of pages in the chapter written by Wippel, no chapter discusses the existential revolution in metaphysics for which Aquinas is famous. Thomas's understanding of being (*esse*) as the act of existing (*actus essendi*) is the core of his thought, including the *Summa Theologiae*, and it is virtually absent from this book. This absence is also apparent in the list of suggested readings provided by Davies at the end of the book. With the sole exception of *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas*

Aquinas, we find no books or articles by Etienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, or Joseph Owens, the main proponents of the existential interpretation.

The reason for this is that Davies's plan was to put together a book that would appeal to members of the Anglo-American tradition of philosophy. The list of suggested readings and, indeed, the cast of contributors themselves make it clear that this is a work of analytical, not existential, Thomism. Analytical Thomism is a relatively recent movement that approaches the philosophy of Aquinas through the resources of analytic philosophers such as Frege, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Saul Kripke. As I mentioned earlier, Geach, in chapter 4, relies on the work of Frege to explain Aquinas's real distinction between form and existence.

Davies has every right, of course, to compile a book on the *Summa Theologiae* from the perspective of analytical Thomism. However, since the book is aimed at newcomers to Aquinas, I feel he also has a duty to inform his readers that there are other interpretations of Aquinas, and to provide some sources for further study in the suggested readings. The existential interpretation is simply too important to ignore. Indeed, Joseph Owens has argued persuasively that earlier interpretations of Thomas's metaphysics come to their "full flower" in the existential interpretation.[1]

In closing, I want to make it clear that I am not unsympathetic to analytical Thomism. Indeed, I think its emphasis on modern logic and the clarification of language and concepts has much to offer Thomism, as long as the key metaphysical contributions of Aquinas remain intact. On this last point, I share the concern expressed by Brian J. Shanley:

"There is cause for optimism then about the stimulus to Thomism that could come from Analytical Thomism.... [H]owever, the major cause for concern is metaphysical. At the heart of Aquinas's philosophy is his understanding of being as ultimately rooted in *esse* as *actus essendi*. This does not fit with analytical metaphysical dogmas. Here then is where the ultimate test of allegiance lies. It is possible, of course, to be an analytic philosopher who offers interesting readings of Aquinas without any commitment to his doctrine of being. But I would not call such a one a Thomist, nor, I presume, would he call himself one. What I am arguing is that to be a Thomist of any stripe requires some primary commitment to Thomas's metaphysics; without that commitment, one may be an interpreter or even a specialist, but one is not a Thomist. It is a matter of debate, of course, what other doctrines of

St. Thomas one must adhere to in order to be a Thomist and surely the items are broader than the metaphysics of *esse*. But however one draws the Thomistic circle, the core must be *esse* in St. Thomas's sense, not Frege's." [2]

Notes

[1]. Joseph Owens, *St. Thomas and the Future of Metaphysics* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1957), 36.

[2]. Brian J. Shanley, "Analytical Thomism," *The Thomist* 63 (1999): 125-137, 136-137.

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