

## THE METAPHYSICS REVIEWED

No exaggeration is possible in the commendation of Professor Rowan for a production of high technical excellence, for the achievement of his aim as translator, and for the consequent service rendered to the contemporary state of metaphysics. This translation of the *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle* by St. Thomas Aquinas can only encounter admiration as a task of thorough scholarship. The result is that expected value of any sound translation of a great work, its availability to students lacking the language of the original, its serviceability to scholars as a standard and excellent version for vernacular quotation and citation.

But before any detailed notice of the translation itself, one is first impressed by the technical perfection of these volumes as an independent advantage and as a personal contribution of the translator to a more fruitful use of the *Commentary*. The Bekker numeration of the Aristotelian text and that of the Cathala-Spiazzi editions of the *Commentary* are clearly incorporated. The advantages for comparison and citation are obvious. Further, the critical studies pertinent to various versions of Aristotle employed by St. Thomas have been concisely summarized in the Introduction and admirably applied throughout the text. As to the variants of the text of the *Commentary* itself, the translator in footnotes briefly states throughout the work either his reasoned choice among them, or his own emendations of the text he uses, that of the Cathala-Spiazzi editions. An invaluable service is afforded by the translator's identification of philosophers second schools, or of other authors to which the Aristotelian text alludes, and the precise citations supplied for more general references made by St. Thomas in the *Commentary*. These technical devices are all relegated to footnotes. The edition, however, is not overburdened with footnotes, nor are such notes devoted to the intrusion of doctrinal discussions into the presentation of St. Thomas' work. Some may perhaps wish that the *schemata* found at the beginning of the books and lessons of the Cathala-Spiazzi editions had a counterpart in the present work. Others, however, would question the advantage of this, and be content with the table of contents found at the beginning of each book.

As translator, Professor Rowan has declared that his aim has been to produce as faithful and accurate a rendition of St. Thomas' work as circumstances—especially the as yet unfulfilled task of the Leonine Commis-

sion for the *Omnia Opera* of St. Thomas to provide a critical text of the *Commentary*—permit. Fidelity and accuracy have been achieved, but not by a rigidly conservative transliteration. Those lacking Latin are provided with a version that by the simplicity and clarity of its *English* allows the true thought of St. Thomas to emerge, with a minimal loss of the tone and flavor of the original. Those familiar with the Latin text will, of course, stick over this or that choice of expression. The work does, however, seek to minimize ambiguities for those to whom certain Latin phrases are overlaid with technical and doctrinal nuances, by placing the Latin in parentheses within the translation. It is well here to point out certain examples of uneasiness prompted very occasionally by the translation. Thus, L. IV, l. 1, n. 540: “. . . *Negatio et privatio, quam dicimus in ratione esse, quia ratio de eis negociatur quasi de quibusdam entibus, dum de eis affirmat vel negat aliquid.*” It is the verb *negociatur* that troubles: “We say that these (negation and privation) exist in the mind because the mind busies itself with them as kinds of being while it affirms or denies something about them” (Vol. I, p. 219). Again, L. V, l. 1, n. 749: “*Et quia ea quae in hac scientia considerantur sunt omnibus communia, nec dicuntur univoce, sed secundum prius et posterius de diversis. . . .*” is translated: “. . . And since the attributes considered in this science are common to all things, they are not predicated of various things univocally, but in a prior and subsequent way . . .” (Vol. I, pp. 299-300). The introduction of the term *attributes* does not seem fortunate; both verbs, *considerantur* and *dicuntur* are governed by the *quia*; but it is especially the phrase *in a prior and subsequent way* that strikes one as not sharply capturing the original. Again in L. XII, l. 1, n. 2419: “*Nam ens dicitur quasi esse habens, hoc autem solum est substantia quae subsistit,*” becomes: “For being means something having existence, but it is substance alone that subsists” (Vol. II, p. 854). The *but* may be read with an adversative connotation, not contained in the Latin, and apt to induce ambiguity. Such difficulties are few; they will be dismissed by many, who, however, will doubtless find some unsatisfying phrase or other. Strangely enough, only in the *Prooemium* is there any passage to which the present reviewer would take any marked exception. The translation—“For the intelligible object and the intellect must be proportionate to each other and must belong to one and the same genus, since the intellect and the intelligible object are one in actuality” (Vol. I, p. 1)—in this last phrase seems to be seriously defective, in its rendering of: “. . . *Intelligibile enim et intellectum oportet proportionata esse, et unius generis cum intellectus et intelligibile in actu sint unum*” (*Pro-*

*oemium*). The objection is to the phrase *are one in actuality*. The intentional union connoted by the Latin expression, between the *intellectus in actu* and the *intelligibile in actu* does not seem well conveyed by the translation. The latter may well be taken to affirm an ontological unity.

These issues, minor as they are, have been raised simply to acknowledge that in the translation of a work whose content is so doctrinally meaningful, and, as such, so exacting of precision, some such difficulties are inevitable. The reviewer performs a function in pointing them out. The translator of the present work is to be congratulated that they are so few. By his own abundantly evident labors, he is the best witness to the need of those who use the translation to seek ultimate clarification occasionally from the original, its letter and its total doctrinal context.

What is the significance of the appearance of this work for the current state of metaphysics? Among the critical questions summarized in Professor Rowan's Introduction, is that dealing with the date of the composition of the *Commentary*. The late date, 1271-1272, is accepted as the best founded answer. The Introduction also accurately assesses the role of the medieval commentator, in pointing up the personal competence of St. Thomas, and in emphasizing the Angelic Doctor's appreciation and use of sound philosophical methodology to expose and evaluate the truth and process of Aristotle's thought. The *Commentary* is not an exercise in philology or historical methodology; it is a philosophical treatise on what St. Thomas saw as a single body of doctrine, whose parts and processes he has skillfully knit together with the ultimate aim of exposing the nature of entity, its properties and causes (cf. Introduction, pp. x-xi). To the perennial doctrinal significance of the *Commentary*, it is not ultimately important to determine whether the Angelic Doctor suspected the literary unity of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. What is important is that in his *Commentary* he himself is professedly discussing and developing the single unit that is the science of metaphysics. This is the mature Thomas, writing concurrently with the composition of the *Summa Theologiae*, with these things to say about metaphysics. His use of the scientific methodology in exposing the writings of Aristotle is not the disinterested textual arrangement of the exegete, but the philosopher's personal quest for and commitment to truth. This methodology is directed toward the aim of all philosophical investigation, the possession of truth with certitude, both as to the principles and the conclusions of the science. The Introduction of Professor Rowan, with its lucid grasp of the nature of the *Commentary*, but above all the straightforward translation of the work itself, calls forceful atten-

tion to the fact that the *Commentary* in all its significance stands ready at hand. He thus provides for a more universal impact of the work upon the current state of metaphysics.

There is much in St. Thomas' own metaphysical synthesis which is not made explicit in the *Commentary*. But in his role as commentator he is convinced and committed to the truth of what he exposes. To all readers—and they can now be many more—it should be repeatedly plain that the subject of metaphysics in St. Thomas' mind is neither essence nor existence, but *being*, that which is; thus substance, the primary, experienced instance of being, is its chief concern. Evident as well from the painstaking labors extended, is St. Thomas' conviction that metaphysics is science; indeed as the first human wisdom, preeminently so. There is need to accept the reminder he thus underlines, that the exigencies of its scientific process are formidable, but that there can be no other effective path towards ultimate philosophical certitude. While this age, on all levels of intellectual pursuit, may well look upon itself with wonder at its own anxious vitality, it is well that it also remind itself of the calm, austere discipline, exemplified by the *Commentary*, necessary to reach the borders of the mind's natural striving: the possession of the *science* of all reality through causes. Let it be said that this austere grappling with the barest bones of the truth is not noticeably appealing to or characteristic of the contemporary intellectual scene. But the poetical, the rhetorical beget persuasion; not the scientific habit of metaphysics. Much that has been written in the last decades to set forth the "genuine" Thomistic metaphysics, would seem to offer new, hitherto undreamed of, ways. Such new insights have rallied to them as to a latter day gnosis their ardent devotees. No one can object to such enthusiastic allegiance. But the *Commentary* of St. Thomas does stand as a reminder that there is no flashy metaphysics that is *ad mentem Divi Thomae*; nor is there any shortcut, bypassing the tortuous path of scientific discipline. The first step along this path is neither a blinding intuition of being, nor the revelation of *esse* from a burning bush, nor a painfully felt experience of human existence. It is the apprehension, perhaps prosaic, of *that which is*, of being, as separable from matter. If the development of the science is indeed tortuous, the difficulty arises not from the carefully delineated, reality-orientated canons of Aristotelian-Thomistic epistemology, but from the experience of the discipline involved in subjective conformity to their demands. Since the early seventeenth century, the *Commentary* has ceased to be the vehicle for the exposition of the science of metaphysics. It does not seem extreme to claim that there have been very

few satisfactory expositions of metaphysics, truly presented according to the mind and method of St. Thomas. His own *Commentary* stands as his authentic legacy to point to the straitened, but solely effective way to pursue and to present from this and his other writings a genuinely Thomistic metaphysics.

Finally, the very success of this English version in its accurate reflection of the unadorned, sober language of the *Commentary* itself provides a further service, especially perhaps to the Christian philosopher. Metaphysics is first philosophy, wisdom, a kind of divine science. As such it is perfective of the natural capacity of the mind, and thus eminently worthy of cultivation. But it is philosophy; it is natural wisdom; it is theology in a sense that pales before Sacred Theology. The intellectual ascesis it exacts is rewarded by a faint glimpse of the Infinite, hardly to be compared with the warm light of revealed truth. Nor can it directly solve, or even considerably touch the concrete problems of the human situation. Yet one must remain content with the limits of a purely natural, and strictly speculative science, to grasp St. Thomas' own metaphysics. That metaphysics is a study of being, not a kind of mystical experience. Difficult as the science may be, it does have a discernible starting point, demonstrable conclusions, a discoverable term. In short, it is an acquired science; it need not be presented breathlessly with enigmatic suggestions of the unfathomable, nor with the vocabulary of a kind of mystery cult restricted to the initiate. Whatever the historical vagaries that have beset the term "Thomistic metaphysics" the *Commentary* is an enduring witness to that finite body of doctrine that is St. Thomas' own metaphysics, with its fundamental starting point, its proper order and discernible traits. His metaphysics is— one is tempted to say *only*—philosophical science. But to realize that is already a step towards appreciating that metaphysics. May such a realization, in all its implications, be furthered by Professor Rowan's eminently "faithful and accurate rendition of St. Thomas' work." This would be to the translator a measure of reward for the excellence of the translation and for the personal contribution to the study of metaphysics which these volumes represent.

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