

Scholasticism:

Tommaso d'Aquino and the Medieval Synthesis

CVSP 202 General Lecture

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PART I – SCHOLASTIC PHILOSOPHY

SCHOLASTIC: “from Middle French *scholastique*, from Latin *scholasticus* “learned,” from Greek *skholastikos* “studious, learned””¹

Came to be associated with the ‘teachers’ and churchmen in European Universities whose work was generally rooted in Aristotle and the Church Fathers.

A. Re-discovering Aristotle & Co – c. 12th Century

The Toledo school: translating Arabic & Hebrew philosophy and science as well as Arabic & Hebrew translations of Aristotle and commentaries on Aristotle (notably works of Ibn Rushd and Maimonides)

- From Toledo, through Provence, to...
- Palermo, Sicily – 13th Century – Under the rule of Roger of Sicily (Norman ruler)
- William of Moerbeke (Dutch cleric): greatest translator of the 13th century, and (possibly) ‘colleague’ of Thomas Aquinas.

B. Greek Philosophy in the Christian monotheistic world: Boethius to scholasticism

- *Boethius*: (c. 475 – c. 526) philosopher, poet, politician – best known for his work *Consolation of Philosophy*, written as a dialogue between Boethius and ‘Lady Philosophy’, addressing issues ranging from the nature and essence of God, to evil, and ethics; translated Aristotle’s works on logic into Latin, and wrote commentaries on said works.
- *John Scotus Eriugena* (c. 815 – c. 877) Irish philosopher of the early monastic period; translated into Latin the works of pseudo-Dionysius, developed a Christian Neoplatonic world view.
- *Anselm* (c. 1033 – 1109) Archbishop of Canterbury from 1093 to 1109; best known for his “ontological argument” for the existence of God in chapter two of the *Proslogion* (translated into English: *Discourse on the Existence of God*); referred to by many as one of the founders of scholasticism.
- *Abelard* (1079 – 1142) philosopher, theologian, poet, and musician; reportedly the first to use the term ‘theology’ in its modern sense; remembered as a tragic figure of romance due to his ‘infamous’ love affair with Heloise; wrote on metaphysics, logic, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, ethics, and theology. *Robert Grosseteste* (c. 1175 – 1253) Bishop of Lincoln, England from 1235 to 1253; philosopher and theologian; commentator and translator of Aristotle and Greek patristic thinkers; influenced by Augustine, and drew on the works of Aristotle, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd.

Other important names include: Peter Lombard (c. 1096 – 1164); Albertus Magnus (1196/1203 – 1289); Roger Bacon (1214 – 1294); Bonaventure (1221 – 1274) John Duns Scotus (c. 1266 –1308); William of Ockham (c. 1288 – c. 1348)

C. Some problematic issues encountered:

- How does one reconcile the invariable causal relations in Nature with God’s miracles?
- If the soul is part of the human ‘substance’, how could one speak of the soul as being immortal as such?
- If, according to Aristotle’s ‘virtue ethics’, the good life is to be found and achieved in the life here-and-now, how is one to understand Heaven then?



by German painter Ludwig Seitz
(1844–1908)

¹ Sources: Online Etymology Dictionary (www.etymonline.com)

PART II – TOMMASO D'AQUINO AND THE MEDIEVAL SYNTHESIS

- A. Brief biographical sketch
- B. An illustration from *SUMMA CONTRA GENTILES*
 - The Pursuit of Wisdom
 - The Ways of Knowing Divine Truth
- C. An Illustration from *SUMMA THEOLOGIAE*

Question II: The Existence of God

Aquinas' method: sets down the question he wishes to address, then presents the 'antithesis' to his position (these are the objections he presents), then moves to state his thesis and the best arguments in support of it (usually beginning with *On the contrary* and *I answer that* in the translation we're using), and concludes with the refutations (replies) to the objections previously put forth.

- First Article's question: "Whether the Existence of God is self-evident?"
- Second Article's question: "Whether it can be demonstrated that God exists?"

"...the existence of God, in so far as it is not self-evident to us, can be demonstrated from those of His effects which are known to us."
- Third Article's question: "Whether God exists?"

PART III – CONCLUSION (from the preface to Richard Rubenstein's *Aristotle's Children: How Christians, Muslims, and Jews Rediscovered Ancient Wisdom and Illuminated the Dark Ages*, Richard Rubenstein, published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003)

"In reliving the Aristotelian Revolution, we understand that we are not just the children of Copernicus and Galileo, Adam Smith, and Thomas Jefferson, but Aristotle's children: the heirs of a medieval tradition that seems more intriguing and inspiring as the shortcomings of modernity become clearer. Of course, most of us would not return to the Middle Ages if we could. Few people today would embrace the assumptions and conclusions of the medieval scholastics. But the Aristotelian's quest for meaning is also ours, and we have much to learn from their vision of a science infused by ethics and a religion unafraid of reason. In this little known but formative chapter of our history, we may detect hints of a more humane and integrated global future."