

John Haldane

Reasonable Faith.

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Interest in applying the tools of analytic philosophy to life's big questions continues to grow. Throughout much of its early history, analytic philosophers focused mainly on the minutiae of language and its relation to our ideas and to the world. Their dismissal of metaphysics, inspired by logical positivism and championed by A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth, and Logic*, was eventually reexamined in the light of Wittgenstein, giving birth to a new branch of analytical philosophy bent on examining the logic of Christian moral reasoning and the reasonableness of prayer and even mystical experience. Elizabeth Anscombe and Peter Geach stood at the forefront of a movement that eventually became known as 'analytical Thomism'.

The term was dubbed by John Haldane as a way of describing the interlacing concerns of Anglo-philosophy and scholasticism. Throughout his career, Haldane has touched on a broad range of issues, philosophical and theological, relying on the aid of analytical philosophy. He advocates a return to the 'sapiential dimension' of philosophy referred to in the papal encyclical *Fides et Ratio* and championed by the Socratic legacy. If philosophy has no impact on the way we live, it falls short of its vast potential to assist us in realizing our full humanity. Philosophy offers not just puzzles to be solved, but mysteries to be contemplated. It overlaps with religion to the extent that neither should be content with anything short of wisdom, which engages intellect and will, intelligence and affection, art and science. These are the convictions that drive Haldane's thinking.

He accordingly begins this book by reviewing the ways in which philosophy and religion interact. He identifies the shortcomings of a philosophy that presumes that some form of materialism is true, even if we cannot know which one. This precludes other possibilities, some of which are offered by the world's great religions. Haldane lists several examples: the hypostatic union of Christ's human and divine natures as a doorway to the mind-body problem, religious doctrines relating objective goodness and the divine will as a way of reflecting on the *Euthyphro* dilemma, and the contribution of religion to unveiling the tenuousness of complete neutrality when trying to determine what is just in the face of competing conceptions of the good. Given the insistence of analytic philosophy and Thomism on tight reasoning and argumentation, they can mutually benefit from dialogue and cooperation on all these issues. As an analytical thinker, Haldane does not hesitate to criticize tendencies to consider Thomism a complete, self-sufficient philosophical and theological system. 'Thomists need now to have the courage and the humility to draw upon the best that has been thought and said in the tradition that runs from Moore to Russell to Putnam and Kripke in order to renew Christian religious philosophy' (16).

Whereas the aim of a previous book (*Faithful Reason: Essays Catholic and Philosophical*, Routledge 2004) was to illustrate how topics in Catholic thought bear upon philosophical methods and themes, this volume zeroes in on topics that are primarily philosophical but draw upon the resources of Catholic belief. Haldane builds on a metaphysical foundation he finds compelling for both Catholic faith and analytical philosophy. The former eventually adopted a metaphysics shaped by Aristotle's view of nature, and the latter, with the help of Peter Strawson, delineated a distinction between 'descriptive metaphysics' and 'revisionary metaphysics'. Descriptive metaphysics, rather than pre-construing a mental image of how things should look to us, accepts the appearance of things as a reliable indicator of their ontological structure. Haldane engages in descriptive metaphysics to delineate the difference between particular things and the properties they possess, leading to a discussion of transubstantiation as a matter of 'metaphysical intelligibility' instead of 'natural feasibility'. He stresses the importance of metaphysics for understanding human intellection and the immaterial power that makes knowledge possible, leading, in turn, to an argument for the soul's subsistence after death.

Consistent with his analytic approach, Haldane insists that there are similarities between Wittgenstein and Aquinas. Both, he claims, found themselves in a world of two unsatisfactory scientific ideas. For Wittgenstein, it was scientism and Cartesianism, and for Aquinas, the materialistic interpretation of Aristotle's philosophy of nature and the dualistic neo-Platonism represented by radical Augustinianism. Haldane finds G. K. Chesterton's remark apropos in this regard: the perennial task of philosophy is 'to provide descriptions and explanations that properly recognize the place in, and the contribution of mind to reality, and the place in and contribution of reality to mind' (38). This leads him to entertain the possibility that both realism and anti-realism are false. He walks a fine line between an uncertainty that universals exist extra-mentally and a certainty that not every general term corresponds to a real, mind-independent nature. 'World', he holds, is not a univocal term. There is some significant, specifiable core of the world that is mind-independent, and this concession is enough to oppose anti-realism. To make this concession also opens one to the non-reductive naturalism of Aristotle and its theistic development in Aquinas, leading one to stake a reasonable claim in the non-reducibility of the world to the material.

Haldane is sensitive to the possible objection that his arguments presuppose theism. But he also reminds the reader that, as clearly evident from the writings of Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, the rise of scientific rigor in philosophy did not preclude theism. Haldane does not shy away from placing stock in the human *inclination* to belief and *desire* for God as legitimate domains for philosophical investigation. He sees parallels in Aquinas's position that every natural desire has an objective correlate and the analytical claim that every created tendency has an attainable end. Arguments from an inclination to belief and the desire for fulfillment do not stand apart from other lines of enquiry but 'inform and are informed by them' (79). Openness to this line of inquiry creates space for nature, beauty, and art as areas that yearn for a theological grounding. At the same time, Haldane acknowledges problems inherent to aesthetic arguments without denying 'the potential of material forms to point towards and perhaps embody

further meanings' (93).

In Haldane's opinion, despite the expanding number of philosophical schools, philosophy's aspirations are still too modest. He is convinced that if it is true to its origin and goal, philosophy, like religion, has a spirituality—a spirituality not disengaged from life, but immersed in it. There seems to be a 'domain of thought, feeling and action that is concerned with discerning the ultimate truth about the human condition and with cultivating an appropriate mode of being or demeanor in response to that truth' (104). If we do not take this tendency seriously, we ignore something of fundamental importance for authentic human living. Haldane's plea for philosophy to embrace this task is timely and by no means isolated.

At the same time, one can legitimately ask whether there are limitations to analytic philosophy's engagement with Thomism and, if so, what those limitations are. Brian Shanley, for instance, has criticized analytical Thomism's seemingly neutral stance toward Aquinas's fundamental metaphysical conviction that being is rooted in *esse* understood as *actus essendi*. An adequate grasp of this doctrine cannot be reached solely with the tools employed by analytic philosophy. It eludes articulation if one restricts the philosophical enterprise to an analysis of propositions, words, and concepts, since the intellectual operation that attains being—namely judgment—is not reducible to any of these elements but underlies all of them. For all the progress that has been made through a fruitful dialogue between analytical philosophy and Thomism, many Thomists will read this book hanging in suspense for a satisfactory answer to this nagging issue.

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