

**Pasquale Porro.** *Thomas Aquinas: A Historical and Philosophical Profile*. Trans. Joseph G. Trabbić & Roger W. Nutt. The Catholic University of America Press 2016. 504 pp. \$65.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780813228051); \$34.95 USD (Paperback ISBN 9780813230108).

This monograph is a fine translation of the original Italian, *Tommaso d'Aquino. Un profilo storico-filosofico* (2012) by Pasquale Porro. The Italian hyphenated wording in the title (*storico-filosofico*) expresses the profile's unified approach—an approach that can be understood as an authentic terminus of what may be called an intellectual archeology initiated by Pope Leo XIII who both promulgated *Aeterni Patris* (1879) and established the Leonine Commission (1880) to produce critical editions of the writings of Thomas. In fact, Porro describes this papal prerogative (404) and praises the more recent Leonine editions as 'a genuine point of reference in the sphere of ecclotic and critical textual work' (410). The much delayed and unintended effect of this archeological excavation in the better part of the twentieth century was to wrest Thomas's thought from a reactionary *philosophia aristotelico-thomistica* of seminary Thomism by examining, for example, the many works besides Thomas's *Summa theologiae*, the immediate sources for Thomas's writings, and the surrounding thirteenth century milieu. In like manner, Porro wishes to 'distance Thomas, to some extent, from Thomism' (xiii). In the twentieth century, English titles of this archeological tracing of historical/philosophical profiles include Etienne Gilson's *The Philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas* (1924), Marie-Dominique Chenu's *Toward Understanding Saint Thomas* (1964), James A. Weisheipl's *Friar Thomas D'Aquino: His Life, Thought and Work* (1974, 1983), Brian Davies's *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (1992), Jean-Pierre Torrell's *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work* (1996), and John F. Wippel's *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (2000). In these illustrious works, some lean historically (Chenu, Weisheipl, Torrell), and others lean philosophically (Gilson, Davies, Wippel). But Porro's monograph most harmonizes the historical and philosophical approach.

The book's historical structure resembles Weisheipl and Torrell's chronological division: 1. Student Years and Baccalaureate, 2. The First Paris Regency (1256–1259), 3. The Return to Italy: The Project of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, and the Writings of the Orvieto Period, 4. The Years in Rome and the Construction of the *Summa theologiae*, 5. The Second Paris Regency (1268–1272), and 6. The Last Neapolitan Period and Complex Legacy. This division palpably indicates the *historical* profile of an itinerant friar who walked over 9,000 miles (393, n. 13). The English edition should have kept the hefty table of contents from the original. In stripping the Italian edition of its four-page table of subheadings (e.g., 'The Commentary on the *Sentences*') and strings of topical headings (e.g., 'Theology and Philosophy: A First Sketch'), the translation somewhat diminishes from the outset the original's *philosophical* orientation. As with the biographies of Weisheipl and Torrell, this translated monograph includes a catalogue of Thomas's works (409–17), including English translations, and a chronology of the saint's life (439–44).

One of the benefits of this translation is that it transmits to English speakers some of the wide scholarship that Porro possesses besides his own from the continent. For example, Porro refers to B. Faes de Mottoni, T. Suarez-Nani, and B. Roling for Thomas's angelology (159 n. 53), and he refers to G. Zuanaazi and C. Fabro for Thomas's new ordering of the 'modes' of achieving knowledge of God in the prologue to his Commentary on John's Gospel (264–7). Porro also regularly relies on Leonine editors (especially Bazán, Dondaine, Gauthier, Oliva, and Luna), relaying some of the discussion for the dating of each work, but he sometimes challenges their judgments as well. For example, Porro questions Gauthier's harsh judgment of Thomas's Commentary on Aristotle's *De*

*anima* as for the most part ‘dead science’ because, according to Porro (and Gauthier himself), the practice of commentary for Thomas is ‘above all an attentive and scrupulous propaeduetic for the elaboration of his own work’ (261).

The book’s philosophical treatment resembles Gilson and Wippel’s thematic division: principles of nature, essence-existence, faith-reason, knowledge of singulars, the passions, and so on. Although Porro twice praises Gilson’s ‘felicitous expression’ of the ‘metaphysics of exodus’ (45, 257), Porro refers to Wippel’s scholarship eighteen times. He agrees with Wippel that the second stage of the *De ente et essentia* (chapter 4) sufficiently proves the real distinction between essence and existence (*esse*) (21), and he seems to agree with Wippel and Aertsen that the negative judgment of *separatio* sufficiently attains the subject of metaphysics, *ens commune* (113–4). On the possibility of Christian philosophy, Porro ambiguously sides with Wippel. He agrees with Gilson on Thomas’s practice of subsuming philosophy under theology: ‘philosophers did once exist and from them many useful doctrines can be appropriated, while others can be corrected or refuted, but philosophy as such (as *pure* philosophy) is something now obsolete, outdated’ (47). Whereas Gilson might thereby conclude that philosophy is transformed, Porro concludes, ‘in Thomas’s eyes nothing existed that could be called a Christian philosophy’ (47). Philosophy is rather ‘perfectly integrated in his theological reflection’ (xi). Thomas accordingly comments on *De anima* and the *Nicomachean Ethics* in order to draft the *Summa theologiae*, but Thomas (inspired by Albert the Great) would also respond to ‘the duty of never neglecting engagement with the profane sciences,’ including the study of lightning and earthquakes (340).

At the time of writing, Porro taught at the University of Bari until 2013 when he became professor in the history of medieval philosophy at the University of Paris. By 2013, Porro had 158 publications on wide-ranging topics, and many of these research interests show up in his monograph. For example, Porro discusses the scientific status of theology (40–4), the reception of the *Liber de Causis* and Proclus (191–5, 340–5), the notions of contingency, necessity, and causality (146–50, 333–6, 387–92), and even Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (392 n. 12). Porro moreover provides much more philosophical context than Weisheipl or Torrell. He frequently discusses Thomas’s thought in light of Avicenna and Averroes. Besides Aristotle, other important sources Porro often mentions are Boethius, Augustine, Albert the Great, Pseudo-Dionysius, William of Moeberke, and Moses Maimonides. Porro also mentions minor though crucial figures on subjects such as the human soul’s corporeal and incorporeal status where ‘Thomas probably borrows as much from Nemesius’s *De natura hominis* as from the *Liber de Causis*’ (243). In addition, Porro helpfully situates Thomas’s immediate ‘complex legacy’ with Bishop Tempier’s condemnations, Henry of Ghent, the quasi-formation of an early ‘thomism’ and ‘anti-thomism,’ and the reactionary controversies between the Franciscan (e.g. *Correctorium*) and Dominican schools (e.g. *correctoria corruptiorii*).

Neophytes will appreciate Porro’s pedagogical style. Porro charts the Common Doctor’s often complicated though core material through dozens of schematizations (e.g., ‘the hierarchy of reality,’ 25; ‘The knowing process,’ 235), bullet points (e.g., ‘the general plan’ of the *prima secundae* and the *secunda secundae*, 281–2; ‘the fundamental points of the Catholic faith on spiritual substances,’ 383), and summaries (‘the five ways in both the *Contra Gentiles* and in the *Summa theologiae*,’ 136). This structured and focused clarity does not prevent Porro from exploring more obscure tributaries such as the soul and the formation of the embryo (161–4), the beautiful as something divine and really identical to the good (203–5), the possibility of annihilating creatures (214–5), the ‘neurophysiological basis of knowledge’ in different parts of the brain (230–1), the fires of hell punishing through confinement (254–5), the absolutely rational ‘scholastic demonology’ (277–80), the ‘place’ and ‘meanings’ of love (286–8), the primacy of the contemplative life (302–

4), and the status of the *magister* (310–12). The translators note that ‘Porro writes in straightforward, clear Italian’ (vii). The original Italian is also evocative, so the occasional transliteration from the Italian poetically stretches the English imagination: the relation of the procession of creatures to those of the trinitarian persons is taken as a neuralgic (*nevralgico*) point of the prologue to the *Sentences* Commentary (30); transcendental concepts transversally (*trasversalmente*) embrace all the categories (60); initiating the whole plexus (*plesso*) of divine science from a knowledge of God seems problematic (99); ‘Thomas the theologian is not the champion of the irenic conciliation (*il paladino della conciliazione irenistica*) of theology and philosophy’ (155); ‘our intellect is, so to say, calibrated (*calibrato*) for knowing sensible realities’ (170).

Two minor notes on Porro’s approach deserve mention. First, the historical division (perhaps surprisingly) shows how comparatively little Thomas wrote on human action and law. Accordingly, Porro traces only a brief account (281–307) based mostly on Thomas’s Commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Summa theologiae* (I-II). Second, Porro makes about a dozen anonymous objections to ‘twentieth century Neo-Thomism’ (49), which is only associated in the final pages with the names of Gilson and Garrigou-Lagrange (406). On the one hand, this legerdemain prohibits the advanced student from grasping the contours of twentieth century interpretations, so it is regrettable. On the other hand, this practice imitates the medieval example of not explicitly acknowledging contemporaries and focusing on primary authors. In this direct way, Porro marvelously synthesizes the historical and philosophical contours of Thomas’s thought.

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