Henry of Ghent
*Summa of Ordinary Questions: Articles Six to Ten on Theology***,** translated and with an introduction by Roland J. Teske, SJ.
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This translation of selected articles from Henry of Ghent's *Summa of Ordinary Questions* is part of the Medieval Philosophy Texts in Translation series from Marquette University. The translator, Roland Teske, is the current series editor, and he is to be commended for including this volume in the series as it makes available in English an invaluable text for those with a professional interest in medieval philosophy and theology. Henry of Ghent is a little known figure outside the (growing) circle of professional philosophers with an interest in Scholasticism. But he was pivotal in the last thirty years of the 13th century, playing a major role in one of the key events of the period, viz., the Condemnations of 1270 and 1277. Anyone interested in understanding Henry's thought, particularly his views on the relationship between theology and philosophy, will thank Teske for making this text available at such an affordable price, and for his accurate rendering of Henry's Latin.

The translated articles contain Henry's considered views on meta-theology. The leading issue of the day concerned the place of theology within the sciences. Prior to the 13th century, theology enjoyed pride of place in the curriculum, with all the other disciplines being seen as preparatory to work in theology. This position came under threat in the 13th century as all the works of Aristotle were gradually rediscovered and assimilated by scholars working in the universities. As more and more scholars and students fell under the influence of Aristotle, more and more began to question the pre-eminent position of theology within the curriculum. It is in this context that Henry's meta-theology must be located, for his position is best seen as a reaction against the growing influence of Aristotle.

The rediscovery of Aristotle had given rise to two other meta-theologies within the academy, and Henry takes issue with both. The so-called Latin Averroists (of whom Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia were the leading figures) were so impressed by Aristotle's philosophical system, and by the fact that it had been developed without the aid of any divine revelation, that they believed the philosophical sciences could dispense with theology altogether. According to widely circulating formulations (one should remember that the reports we have are hostile) they maintained that the only wise men in the world are philosophers, that there is no more excellent state than to study philosophy, that there is no rationally disputable question that philosophers ought not to discuss, and that one knows nothing more for the fact that one knows theology. According to the Latin Averroists, there really is no place for theology amongst the sciences.

Thomas Aquinas was also impressed by the achievements of Aristotle, but he is more accommodating to theology than the Latin Averroists, if not to the extent one might perhaps imagine. Thomas can be seen as occupying the middle ground between the Latin Averroist on the one hand and Henry on the other. Thomas finds a place for both theology and philosophy

within the academy and assigns to each its own autonomous sphere of influence. This more modest position shows itself in the very first question of his *Summa Theologiae*, where Aquinas asks whether there really is any need for theology at all since philosophy, particularly metaphysics, involves the study of all being. He decides that theology is needed because there are some truths necessary for salvation that are not discoverable by unaided human reason (the doctrine of the Trinity being a primary example). Aquinas does admit that some revealed truths are in fact discoverable by unaided reason, but he insists that theology is useful nonetheless because these truths would have taken a long time to discover, they would have been mixed with many errors, and only some people would have the time and ability to find them. So, unlike the Latin Averroists, Aquinas does grant space to theology alongside the philosophical sciences. Equally significant is the fact that Aquinas claims that philosophy cannot contradict the revealed truths of sacred doctrine because truth is one. Aquinas maintains that any contradiction between philosophy and theology must be merely apparent or, if genuine, it is the philosopher, not the theologian, who must give way. That theology can correct the errant philosopher is a significant point that would never be conceded by the Latin Averroists. But given that so much philosophy has little or no bearing on strictly doctrinal matters, Aquinas effectively grants to the philosopher an independence and autonomy many traditional theologians could not accept.

It is against this backdrop that Henry's views are best appreciated. The burden of Henry's articles is to re-establish the traditional view of theology as pre-eminent within the academy. But perhaps the most intriguing point about this reactionary stance is that its defence relies heavily on standard Aristotelian positions. Henry is usually, and rightly, seen as favouring the Platonic/Augustinian tradition rather than the Aristotelian tradition preferred by the Latin Averroists and Aquinas. Yet he begins his case for the pre-eminence of theology by relying on the material object/formal object distinction standardly employed by Aristotelians to distinguish the sciences of physics, mathematics, and metaphysics in order to show that there really is a formal object specific to theology. He grants that the philosophical sciences do indeed cover all being. As a consequence, theology inevitably considers the same beings as the other sciences (that is, the *material* objects of the sciences are often shared). But these beings are not considered in the same way. They are not considered in order to "know their quiddities in terms of themselves" (as is the case with the other sciences) "but insofar as they in some way have the character of divine being in themselves, by which they are referred to him" (a. 7, q. 1). This is a legitimate move in Aristotelian circles, and both the Latin Averroists and Aquinas would have accepted it in principle.

Having made room for theology by identifying its specific formal object (namely, divine being, and all creatures insofar as they are related to divine being), Henry goes on to claim a pre-eminence position for theology amongst the sciences. He claims, first, that of all the sciences theology is "the most certain" (a. 7, q. 2). Again he makes his case on Aristotelian grounds. He claims that "the certitude of knowledge is caused by… the truth of the thing known." Then, adverting explicitly to Aristotle (*Metaphysics* 993b30), he says that eternal, unchanging, things are the most true because they are *always* true, not merely sometimes true. So certain knowledge is had primarily of eternal things. But God is the eternal being *par excellence*, so the certitude of theology is greater than the certitude of any of the other sciences. Theology is also deemed to be the first and universal science without qualification: first because its proper object is the first cause of all being, universal because God is the cause of every being (a. 7, q. 3).

But Henry does not stop there. He says that theology "subordinates" all the other sciences (a. 7, q. 4). Subordination is a technical notion in Aristotelian philosophy of science. On this model each science accepts certain basic principles as axiomatic, and its business is not to defend those principles but to investigate their implications. It is the business of a higher, subordinating, science to defend the principles employed by the subordinated science. Henry argues that because theology deals with the *ultimate* cause of things, while the various sciences deal with the ontologically dependent *proximate* causes of the beings falling within their domain, theology subordinates all the other sciences while being subordinated by none (a. 7, q. 5).

But Henry is not finished. Theology is the most "authoritative" of the sciences because it directs and regulates all the others to their proper end (a. 7, q. 6). The leading idea here, one shared by Aquinas but not by the Latin Averroists or Aristotle himself, is that the ultimate end of human life is beatitude, which is achieved by union with and knowledge of God. The implication is that all of the sciences are ultimately in the same business – achieving knowledge of God – and it naturally falls to theology to lead these efforts since God is theology's proper object. Now the idea that one's end regulates one's activities is distinctly Aristotelian, so again Henry is making his case on Aristotelian grounds. But the clear implication now is that the philosophical sciences are not autonomous, self-directing and self-regulating activities at all, as the Latin Averroists and Aquinas would have it. While it is true that Aquinas insists that theology must on occasion correct philosophy, there is no question of theology setting the agenda or stipulating the methods to be employed by philosophers, as we find here in Henry. And Henry does not baulk from taking the last, perhaps now predictable step. He claims in article 7, question 10 that the other sciences are to be learned only for their use in theology.

The other aspects of Henry's meta-theology are not as important from a philosophical or historical point of view, so I will only note the main questions raised in the remaining articles. Having established in Article 6 that theology is indeed a science, he goes on in Article 8, *On the Final Cause of Theology*, to ask whether theology ought ever to have been committed to writing (answer: yes). In Article 9, *On the Author or Efficient Cause of Theology*, Henry asks whether the same author is responsible for the two Testaments, and on whose authority we ought to believe them (answers: yes to the first, God's alone to the second). And finally, in Article 10, *On the Authority of Sacred Scripture*, Henry asks whether the authority of theology trumps the authority of the Church and the authority of natural reason (answers: a very qualified yes in both cases) and whether scripture can be contrary to natural reason (answer: only if one has made a mistake in one's natural reasoning).

Now one might very well ask why these medieval debates have any bearing on philosophy as it is understood today. The simple answer is that Henry won the medieval debate on meta-theology, and this victory was institutionalised in the Condemnations of 1270 and 1277. Henry was himself involved in the preparation of the famous 1277 list of 219 condemned propositions, many of which are associated with the Latin Averroists and Thomas Aquinas. So from the last quarter of the 13th century, and well into the 14th, theology and philosophy developed in an environment that took the pre-eminence of theology for granted in a way Henry would have approved. This environment led to substantial changes in the self-image of philosophy. This is historically significant because early modern philosophy, particularly as we

find it in Descartes, shares all the hallmarks of Henry's reaction to Aristotle. That is, Descartes has much more in common with Henry doctrinally than he does with either Aquinas or the Latin Averroists. Inasmuch as we are all the heirs of Descartes, we are all the heirs of Henry. This set of articles provides invaluable insight into the details of that crucial debate.

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