

Gentrain Unit 6. Thomas Aquinas, April 17, 2013, Dr. Cindy Ausec

Life

- Born in 1227 in Roccasecca into Noble family of part Roman and part German blood
- Became a Dominican friar. Taught at Cologne and then Paris and finally in Italy where he wrote his great books now the standard theological treaties of the Roman Catholic Church: *Summa Contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologiae*

Reason and Revelation

- Medieval world was experiencing a resurgence of philosophy: exposure to the works of the Islamic philosophers and Aristotle (lost to the West for many centuries)
- Thomas attempts to reconcile reason and revelation, philosophy and theology and Aristotle and Christ
 - Reason and faith are lower and higher forms of understanding that are complementary to each other
 - Orthodox view that the truths known through revelation provide the beginning axioms from which philosophy proceeds

Summa Theologica

- Thomas' method in constructing his arguments came to be characteristic of Scholasticism
 - First he would list objections to his view
 - Then he would state the contrary views
 - Finally he would state his own view- presumed to reconcile the opposing views
- Questions 1 The nature and domain of Sacred Doctrine
 - Sacred Doctrine is a science - it proceeds from principles made known by the light of a higher science – the science of God
 - Sacred Doctrine is one science – considers some things under the formality of being revealed, all things which have been divinely revealed have in common the formality of the object of this science
 - Sacred doctrine is both a speculative and practical science; as God, by one and the same science knows both Himself and His works
 - It is nobler than both speculative and practical sciences which it transcends
 - By Reason of the greater certitude – from the light of the divine knowledge which cannot err
 - By reason of the higher dignity of its subject-matter
 - This doctrine is wisdom above all human wisdoms absolutely
 - God is the subject-matter of this science.
 - Sacred Scripture – has no science about itself, disputes argumentatively with one who denies its principles only if the opponent admits some at least of the truths obtained through divine revelation

- Questions 2 God's Existence
 - Human reason can establish God's existence using at least five cogent arguments:
 1. An argument from motion to an unmoved mover
 2. An argument based on the necessity of a first efficient cause
 3. An argument from possibility to necessity (a being who must exist)
 4. An argument accounting for the gradation to be found in things
 5. An argument drawn from consideration of design in the structure of the world

Nature of God

- God is simple, without composition of parts
- God is perfect, lacking nothing
- God is infinite - not finite in the ways that created beings are physically, intellectually, and emotionally limited
- God is immutable, incapable of change on the levels of God's essence and character
- God is one, without diversification within God's self. The unity of God is such that God's essence is the same as God's existence

Reason's Limitations

- Reason is unable to establish more than general propositions. It cannot know what God had done historically unless it receives divine revelation as contained in the Scriptures
 - Thus philosophy is subordinate to faith. Faith based on revelation knows things that are beyond reason's unaided power to establish
- Yet faith still needs reason - nothing should be accepted by faith that is contrary to reason
 - Aquinas demonstrated that for Christians there is no risk in this approach
 - An honest examination of the Christian revelation show it to be in no part opposed to reason – but rather in all its parts , built upon principles of reason

Thomas Aquinas on Philosophy and Theology

- Philosophy begins with the world of sense experience and by the exercise of scientific reflection (reason) ascends to God
- Theology begins with the revealed truths that are from God and descend to humankind and the world
- Reason and revelation unite to make known more fully the nature and character of God