

GOD, TRUTH, AND ESSENCE:
METAPHYSICAL PERSPECTIVES IN AQUINAS.
FOREWORD

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THE Monothematic Section of «Acta Philosophica», vol. 24 (2015), introduced the issue of immateriality in the philosophy of mind of some anglophone, contemporary scholars of the thought of Thomas Aquinas. This new Monothematic Section focuses on current “Anglophone Thomistic” metaphysics and epistemology. Articles by I. Silva, J. Brent, T. Pawl and C. Martin represent a selection within these fields without the pretense of offering a systematic or overall view of such a vast area. Rather, they are samples that demonstrate the vitality of investigation on central points of the philosophy of Aquinas (God, truth, and essence) and its ability to enter into dialogue with contemporary approaches that arose in analytical thinking and philosophical issues raised by science. Both the analytical method, taken in a broad sense as not being limited to the pure philosophy of language, and the confrontation with science, are approaches especially valid for Thomistic thought. Given the developments at the intersection between analytical philosophy, science, and Thomism today, there are new opportunities regarding themes both new and ancient, for instance in the area of philosophical theology.

Ignacio Silva’s paper addresses the problem of how, today, one should understand God’s intervention in an evolving universe, noting the resurgence of a certain philosophical theology stimulated by the cosmology of the universe and also including the ultimate questions of meaning raised by evolutionary biology concerning the origin of the species. Doubt oscillates between divine “interventionism” that risks lowering God to the level of natural causes and that could reduce His autonomy, and the temptation to postulate divine action in the world in accord with the uncertainty or the incompleteness of physical causes. Silva’s article presents the Thomistic distinction of first causality and second causality as a way to explain how God’s providential action within the succession of natural events, even contingent ones, is not to be understood in a competitive manner, but rather according to the inherent completeness of divine and natural causality respecting their own distinct levels.

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James Brent, meanwhile, illuminates the philosophical theological framework of the divine creation of the universe rescuing the importance of the notion of order, extended to the whole cosmos, so that we can set up, in an appropriate way, the question of the existence of God as creator of the world. The natural order, while not imposed by man, as a rational arrangement of a multiplicity of things in their becoming, refers to an intelligent cause but not of the individual natural things. Brant proposes, rather, that the reference to God in creatures may be viewed only when the philosophical glance is opened to an ordered and interactive totality of things, i.e., the universe. Consequently, we cannot arrive at God as the cause of nature unless we address the causal question of the universe without requiring a closed and exhaustive scientific knowledge of the cosmos. In the traditional, Thomistic five ways, there is always the vision of a certain universal order. Order is composed not only of relationships, but of reliance on a principle of order, which in ultimate terms is rational, that is, intelligent. Knowledge of the universal order is able to bring us to the sapiential knowledge of God, present in both the common understanding of plain persons and in the more specialized frameworks of philosophy. From human wisdom, one can arrive at the Wisdom of God. The latter is not just contemplation of universal order, but is communicative, in a creative sense, of an order to creatures, especially to human reason. Therefore, synergy exists between Divine Wisdom and human wisdom.

Timothy Pawl, then, uses the analytical approach to address the theme of truth. Contemporary metaphysics has brought to the fore, in some authors, the topic of truth-makers, i.e., the relationship between the language of truth (true phrases) and the existents to which the language refers. These existents are truth-makers. They are the epistemic cause of true statements. The truth-maker of the phrase “the sun shines” is the reality of the sun which is shining. The question, in its apparent simplicity, once again, re-proposes the question of cognitive realism in a new context. But it is not exempt from difficulties, such as to find the truth-maker of negative sentences, which correspond to a “non-being”, especially those of the future contingent, and of the past, that is, those realities that are apparently “not beings”, if you follow the school of philosophy called presentism, rather than that called eternalism (the latter assigns reality to the present, the past and the future). Pawl addresses the issue through a careful study of texts of St. Thomas, interpreting him as a presentist. Pawl narrows the analysis down to temporal propositions and to those that refer to entities that do not exist, such as dragons. The issue, as the reader will see, is sophisticated and requires a special conceptual accuracy. The texts of St. Thomas offer cues to follow the issue closely and deeply. Pawl’s proposed solution is worthy of attention. True propositions need a truth-maker, but not in an absolute way because there are restrictions that help to solve the problem of the on-

tological foundation of truth in an appropriate manner, in harmony with the metaphysical realism of Thomas.

Finally, Christopher Martin's paper suggests a comparison between the concept of natural essence proposed by the contemporary philosopher of language S. Kripke and the essence or nature according to Aristotle. The comparison is justified, since Kripke was rightly regarded as the analytical philosopher who most effectively redeemed the natural essence of Aristotle, based not on an *a priori* Kantian synthesis, but on the understanding in retrospect, that is inductive, of a natural necessity. However, Kripke never did such a comparison. He arrived at the notion of essence (natural kinds) through linguistic considerations regarding the meaning and reference of common and proper nouns, in his famous work *Naming and Necessity*. By comparing Kripke and Aristotle's view of essence, Martin proposes deepening the understanding of what it means to speak of the essence of a thing. Kripke, despite his merits, is likely to remain at the level of classification, which is not explanatory. Step by step, following a series of restrictions on the definition of essence, in which the article manages to almost identify Kripkean and Aristotelian essence, Martin then concludes by showing the importance of understanding essence as a profound explanatory principle of the kind of thing considered (a type of mineral, a botanical species, a zoological species). The challenge remains, however, to make explicit the content of this essence. Martin alludes to specific active powers of natural substances, provided that the scientific clarification of natural substances can be understood in continuity with the Aristotelian project of an essential knowledge of nature.

The variety and depth of the interconnected themes studied in this Monothematic Section presents a wide horizon for further philosophical study and a challenge to respond to the questions raised. While drawing from empirical science and the analytical method, Thomistic research in epistemology and metaphysics offers stimulating responses to some of the most challenging questions of our day.