Theology as a Science: Aquinas on How Philosophy Transforms Theology
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Convivium Irenicum 2022

Introduction

While it is often said that philosophy is the handmaiden of theology, some use this as an excuse to treat philosophy as auxiliary. In the modern mind, the harmony of these two disciplines has fractured, even among those who advocate for the compatibility of faith and reason. On the contrary, Thomas Aquinas defends theology as a science precisely because it appropriates an Aristotelian understanding of philosophy as a science in a way that acknowledges the unity of all knowledge and the harmony of faith and reason.

Aquinas's work arises in a time of intellectual revolution as Aristotle was rediscovered in the Latin West. Theologians in Oxford and Paris were reluctant to accept Aristotelian conclusions which they thought were incompatible with Scripture or they accepted him with error inherited from Muslim commentators. Before this, Scriptural interpretation took a more allegorical, mystic, and Platonic approach. Aquinas recognized in Aristotle a comprehensive epistemology that verified the unity of all knowledge and could be used for a scientific study of Scripture. Instead of filtering out the literal for the sake of the spiritual or allegorical, exegetical work embraced rigorous doctrinal dialectic that used Aristotelian logic to solve disputes.

My aim is to (1) tell the story of Aristotle's use, loss, and recovery in the history of early medieval theology in order to (2) show how Thomas Aquinas helps scholasticism mature as it transforms theology into a science. Then, I will (3) compare Platonic and Aristotelian approaches to Scriptural interpretation. This conversation is meant to encourage the renewal of theology as a science.

I. The Loss and Recovery of Aristotle

Original Loss of Aristotle (322 BC – 270 AD)

We know that Aristotle's works were lost to the West for a time.[1] Some suppose it began when Constantine relocated the center of the empire to Constantinople in 330 AD. It certainly did not help when Rome was sacked by Visigoths in 410 and fell to Odoacer in 476. The Empire shattered to be reunited and reborn as the Holy Roman Empire under Charlemagne (747–814), quite separate from the East. If the growing cultural divide between Byzantium and the Latin West was not enough, Latin churches did not help when in the sixth century they added *filioque* to the Nicene Creed that had been ratified at the First Council of Constantinople in 381. By 1014 the *filioque* clause was officially adopted into the Latin liturgy. The divide was sealed in the Great Schism of 1054 with the excommunication of the Patriarch of Constantinople. But by now, we are closer to the recovery of Aristotle than his being lost.

The loss of Aristotle partially began immediately after his death in 322 BC. After Alexander the Great died in 323, Athens did not take kindly even to an anti-imperialist Macedonian like Aristotle. He escaped to Chalcis, not wanting the city "to sin twice against philosophy," having already executed Socrates.[2] Aristotle died the following year, and his will, which we still have, names Theophrastus (372–287) his successor as head of the Lyceum. Theophrastus was a genius and continued Aristotle's research, particularly in botany and improved on Aristotle's logic, though he did have his disagreements. Theophrastus' disciple, Demetrius of Phaleron, was an adviser to Ptolemy, one of Alexander's generals, who made

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[1] See David Knowles, The Evolution of Medieval Thought (London: Longmans, 1962): 185–192; Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, Jan Pinbor, eds., *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy from the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism 1100–1600* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982): 55–64;

[2] Antohnoy Kenny, *Ancient Philosophy, A New History of Western Philosophy,* vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004), 90. See also vol. 2, *Medieval Philosophy*.

himself king of Egypt in 305. It may have been Demetrius who suggested creating a library in Alexandria modeled after Aristotle's at the Lyceum, later established by Ptolemy's son Ptolemy II Philadelphus.

After Theophrastus died, his nephew Neleus of Skepsis, one of the last surviving pupils of Aristotle himself, inherited the Lyceum and is said to have hidden Aristotle's works in a cave to prevent them from being confiscated by King Eumenes, who was building a library at Pergamon to rival Alexandria.[3] The works were later brought back to Athens then confiscated by the Roman general Sulla in 86 BC and shipped to Rome to be published by Andronicus of Rhodes. This story has dubious support, but something must account for the lack of Aristotelian studies between Theophrastus and Cicero (106–43 BC). By fifty years after his death, Aristotle would not have recognized Athens as the intellectual epicenter he knew. In tandem with the Lyceum's decline, Plato's Academy gave up metaphysics for skepticism. In their place grew the new schools started by Epicurus and the Stoic Zeno of Citium. These schools came to dominate Roman thought until Marcus Aurelius (121–180 AD), under whose reign Justin Martyr, one of the first Christian philosophers, was executed. Meanwhile, Platonism began to see a revival as Plutarch (c.46–c.120 AD) wrote against the Stoics and Epicureans.

Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215) was one of the first to attempt to harmonize Platonic and Aristotelian thought with Christianity, saying that the study of philosophy was necessary for educated Chrsitians. He preferred Plato and used Aristotle primarily for logic.[4] Introducing Platonic hermeneutics, he explained away difficult passages of the Scripture with allegory, a tradition he started that would last more than a thousand years. His younger contemporary Origen (185–254) studied under the Platonist Ammonius Saccas (c. 175–242) who may have

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[3] Kenny, 34.
[4] Kenny, 110

been a Christian and who also taught Plotinus (c. 204–270) who in turn taught Porphyry (c.

234–305). Influenced by Platonism, Origen thought our resurrected bodies would be spheres. He

also debated other Christian Platonists.

Aristotle among the Christians

To be clear, not all of Aristotle had been lost during late antiquity and the early medieval

period. His *Categories* were continually in use and formed the basis for the beginning of

scholasticism. Some of Aristotle's other works were available in Greek at least in the 4th century

as orator and philosopher Gaius Marius Victorinus (290–364) translated *The Categories* and *On*

Interpretation into Latin, preserving their use in the West. As an aside, Victorinus's conversion

inspired Augustine's conversion. A century later, Boethius (c. 447–524), a Roman senator,

translated more of Aristotle's *Organon,* including *Prior Analytics*, but only his translations of

Categories and *On Interpretation* were widely circulated and combined into a kind of primer on

logic with his *Topical Differences*, his translation of the Pagan Neoplatonist Porphyry's *Isagoge*

(an Introduction to Aristotle's *Categories*), and Cicero's *Topics*.[5] It is claimed that Boethius

intended (but failed) to translate all of Plato and Aristotle, but it is not known how much of their

corpus he had available. Not long after Boethius, widespread use of the Greek language

dissipated in the West.

It is clear that pagan Augustine had access to Aristotle in his twenties in Carthage (c.

374), pointing to the loss of other Aristotelian works before even Victorinus got ahold of them.

Lamenting his pagan abuse of logic and neglect of faith, Augustine says in the *Confessions*,

"What good did it do me that at the age of twenty there came into my hands a work of Aristotle

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[5] Spade, Paul Vincent, "Medieval Philosophy", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/medieval-philosophy/>.

which they call the *Ten Categories*?"[6] A century earlier Plotinus had enough access to Aristotle

to interpret his *Metaphysics* and *De Anima* (*On the Soul*) as advocating for the eternality of

Intellect.[7] Plotinus, born and raised in Roman Egypt, marks a turning point in Aristotelian studies

after which only *Categories* and *On Interpretation* were widely circulated, and mostly as an

introduction to Plato. Aristotle was overshadowed by rising Neoplatonism, and peripateticism

came to an end. Plotinus may have been the last to read Aristotle on his own terms, though even

he used Aristotle primarily as the best expositor of Plato.

Two centuries later, Christian Simplicius (c. 480–560), born in Cilicia, Turkey and

educated in Alexandria and Athens, was a famed defender of Aristotle, having commented on

many of his works, including *Physics*, *On the Soul*, and *On the Heavens*. Meanwhile, a century

earlier, Augustine had access only to *Categories* while in Carthage, 1,600 miles (2600 km) from

Alexandria. Despite being born only three years before Simplicius and being fluent in Greek,

Boethius did not have access to as much of Aristotle's corpus as Simplicius did. It seems that by

the fourth century, the East-West divide was already strong enough that Aristotle's evanescence

was already well underway. The best estimate for when Aristotle was lost to the West remains

the life of Plotinus in the third century. Perhaps it was, then, a result of Constantine relocating the

center of the empire to Constantinople in 330. But as we have seen, it was a gradual occurrence.

Lombard's Scholasticism Prepares the Way

The rediscovery of Aristotle was certainly well underway by the thirteenth century. We

can estimate that the absence of Aristotle's complete corpus was roughly from the time of

Plotinus and Porphyry (c. 204–305) to initial translations into Latin in the 1100's and renewed

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[6] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 4.28.
[7] Gerson, Lloyd, "Plotinus", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/plotinus/>.

study in the 1200's. A revival of learning in the Latin West was already underway when Aristotle

reappeared. Scholasticism likely began in 787 with a decree of Charlemagne to establish schools

in every abbey in the empire.[8] As noted already, Aristotle had never stopped being used as a

primer for Plato and for logic, even among theologians. But now theologians began congregating

in abbys to birth scholasticism. Scholasticism was a method of academic investigation based on

Aristotle's *Categories*, particularly its distinction between substance, essence, and accidental

qualities. This was combined with Aristotle's five predicables found in *On Topics* and explained

by Porphyry's *Isagoge* (*Introduction to the Categories*). The result was a tool for parsing

distinctions as scholasticism combines logic, metaphysics, and semantics into a single method

applied to all sciences.

In 1150–1158 Peter Lombard collected the sayings of past theologians in his *Sentences*

for ease of use in handling disputations about theology. The *Sentences* quickly became the

standard textbook for theology students who would go on to produce their own commentaries on

the work.[9] A precursor to Lombard's sentences were glosses or annotations made in margins or

between lines of text in the Scriptures.[10] Glosses were like ancient handwritten study Bibles and

running commentaries, but Lombard extracted these comments, combined them with other

theological treatises, and began the transformation of theology into what would become

systematic theology. Theological topics were now organized topically in an attempt to provide a

summary of all theology in one work and to provide a resource for solving doctrinal disputes.

This was instrumental in the birth of *disputatio,* a method of theological dialectic that would

[8] Colish, Marcia L., *Medieval Foundations of the Western Intellectual Tradition*, 400–1400 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 66–67.

[9] William E. Carroll, "Thomas Aquinas on Science, *Sacra Doctrina*, and Creation," vol. 1, *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions: Up to 1700*, ed. Jitse M. van der Meer (Danvers: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2008), 219.

[10] Others had previously anthologized quotes from Fathers, but none as successfully or extensively as Lombard. It is also clear that Lombard was not exhaustive and relied heavily on prior compilations. See Knowles, 163.

introduce a problem or thesis and collect often contradictory sayings from authorities, Scripture, church canons, creeds, councils, and Fathers.[11] You can see this method clearly present in the format of Aquinas's *Summa Theologiæ* as he poses a question or thesis, entertains objections, draws on Scripture, theologians, and philosophers, then provides his own argument and answers to objections. The spirit of *disputatio* still persists in the twenty-first century in the overall argumentative nature of theology and the understanding that any work is in dialogue with contemporaries who are usually cited, just as Aquinas made heavy use of citations.

Lombard's collection gave preference to Augustine and Western fathers, due to the East-West divide. What is interesting is his use of St. John of Damascus (c. 675–749), recently translated from Greek, which shows initial contact with Eastern thought as well as a certain agenda harbored by Lombard to prefer Aristotle over Plato. Six hundred years before Aquinas, Damascene foreshadowed Aquinas by preferring an Aristotelian rather than Platonic account of knowledge.[12]

An important reason for the shift in method to *disputatio* was that by the twelfth century theologians were beginning to migrate their studies from the monastery to the newly invented "university." The University of Oxford may have been founded c. 1096 (around Lombard's birth) and expanded when Henry II banned English students from studying at the University of Paris in 1167. The University of Paris was founded c. 1150–70 (around Lombard's death) as an annex of the Notre-Dame cathedral school. Now that theologians studied in a community of scholars, dialectical *disputatio* became essential, taking after the dialectical method of Greek peripatetic schools.

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[11] Knowles, 163.

[12] Joseph Koterski, "On the Aristotelian Heritage of John of Damascus," In *The Failure of Modernism: The Cartesian Legacy and Contemporary Pluralism*, ed. Brendan Sweetman (Washington, D.C.: The American Maritain Association and Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 67.

By the early thirteenth century Lombard's *Sentences* became a standard text at the University of Paris, second only to the Bible. Within twenty years of publication, Lombard's *Sentences* were the subject of elaborate commentaries, despite being opposed by many, such as Abbot Rupert of Deutz (1075–1129) who accused Lombard of preferring scholasticism to the simplicity of the Bible. Teaching on the *Sentences* took the form of lectors, like Aquinas, who would read a passage aloud, briefly explain its meaning, then address a series of questions that arose from the text. Aquinas's teaching notes would become his *Writing on the Book of Sentences* (*Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*). More than 200 commentaries have been collected in England alone, and 150 among Dominicans.[13] While the *Sentences* only took twenty years to become standard, Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, written a hundred years later, took 300 years for Cajetan to install as a textbook of equal or more import. Commentaries on the *Sentences* continued well into the seventeenth century.

Lombard's work inspired careful organization and harmonization on a wide range of subjects, but this is not yet systematic theology. What we need is to knit all of theological inquiry together through a single, consistent methodology. Lombard may have helped scholasticism mature from basic logic to widespread *disputatio*, but we have yet to see how the "New Logic" of Aristotle's *Organon* and wider corpus would transform theology permanently.

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[13] Knowles, 164.

Event	Date
Aristotle	b. 322 BC
Plotinus	b. 204 AD
Aristotle Lost?	**c. 200 / 300**
Victorinus	b. 290
Constantinople	f. 330
Augustine	b. 354
Rome Falls	476
Simplicius	b. 480
Boethius	b. 447
Arab-Byzantine wars	**629–718**
Great Schism	1054
Fall of Toledo	1085
Peter Abelard	1079–1142
U of Oxford & Paris Founded	c. 1096 –1150
Peter Lombard	1096–1160
1st Crusade	1096–98
Gerard, James, & Burbundio trans. Aristotle into Latin	**c. 1125–50**
Albertus Magnus	1200–80
U. Paris puts Aristotle on reading list	1215
Condemnations	1210, '70, '77
Thomas Aquinas	1225–74
Aquinas Master of Theol.	1256

Recovery of Aristotle

The recovery of Aristotle likely begins in the seventh century. Arabs began conquering areas of Byzantium around the Mediterranean, giving their scholars access to many of Aristotle's works that had been preserved by Nestorian Syrian Christians. As they were translated into Arabic and commented upon, Aristotle came to dominate Arab philosophical discourse from the ninth to twelfth centuries. Through trade and war, European Christians gained access to Aristotle and began translating his works and Muslim commentaries into Latin. Regardless of the fact that he was rediscovered, The Philosopher was not welcomed easily.

Aristotle reappeared during a time of renewed learning following Lombard. A decade before the first crusade on May 25, 1085, Muslim occupied Toledo, Spain fell to Christian Alfonso VI of Castile. Following this, Gerard of Cremona, Italy (1114–1187) visited Toledo, who is said to have "arrived at a knowledge of each part of [philosophy] according to the study of the Latins, nevertheless, because of his love for the *Almagest* [a mathematical and astronomical treatise], which he did not find at all amongst the Latins, he made his way to

Toledo, where seeing an abundance of books in Arabic on every subject, and pitying the poverty

he had experienced among the Latins concerning these subjects, out of his desire to translate he

thoroughly learnt the Arabic language."[14] This may have been the initial recovery of Aristotle as

Gerard translated several of his works, including *On the Heavens*, *Posterior Analytics, Physics,*

and *On Generation and Corruption.* During 1125–1150, James of Venice also translated more

works, including *Physics, On the Soul*, *Metaphysics,* and *Posterior Analytics*.[15] Peter Abelard,

who represents a high point of pre-Aristotelian scholasticism, at least in logic, knew of no other

Aristotelian treatise by 1136 than the translations of Victorinus and Boethius of *Categories* and

On Interpretation.[16] But five years later in 1141, the *Heptateuchon* of Theodoric of Chartres

contained the rest of the *Organon*, except the two *Analytics*.[17] By the end of the twelfth century,

most of the Aristotelian corpus was available in Latin, and his complete *Organon* was dubbed

the "New Logic." *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, and *De Anima* were still relatively unknown at this

point.

During the period of 1230–1250, the Faculty of Arts at the 80-year old University of

Paris were already hotly debating *Nicomachean Ethics* based on the partial Latin translations by

Burbundio of Pisa and complete translations by Robert Grosseteste (1246–48).[18] *Nicomachean*

Ethics was placed on the optional reading list for lecturers on holidays in 1215, which brought it

to the attention of the Arts Masters, along with wider study of Aristotle's corpus and renewed

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[14] Charles Burnett, "The Coherence of the Arabic-Latin Translation Program in Toledo in the Twelfth Century." *Science in Context* (2001), 14 (1–2): 249–288

[15] Robert Pasnau, "The Latin Aristotle," In *the Oxford Handbook of Aristotle*, ed. Christopher Shields (OUP: 2012), 666. Available at https://spot.colorado.edu/~pasnau/inprint/pasnau.latinaristotle.pdf

[16] King, Peter and Andrew Arlig, "Peter Abelard", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/abelard/>.

[17] Maurice De Wulf, *History of Medieval Philosophy*, 3rd ed. Trans. P. Coffey (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), §132.1, available at https://maritain.nd.edu/jmc/etext/homp132.htm

[18] Valeria A. Buffon, "The Structure of the Soul, Intellectual Virtues, and the Ethical Ideal of Masters of Arts in Early Commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics*," In *Virtue Ethics in the Middle Ages: Commentaries on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, 1200–1500*, ed. Istvan P. Bejczy (Boston: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2008), 13.

interest in the *Categories*.[19] Aristotle's full *Organon* was finally being studied on its own terms, for its own sake, by the masters of the day. As a result, Latin commentaries on most of his works began appearing, which also commented upon prior Muslim commentaries.

Theologians of the era were beset with the task of assessing how the philosophy of Aristotle and his Muslim commentators would interact with the previous twelve centuries of Christian thought. The reintroduction of Aristotle was tumultuous, and Aquinas's later full appropriation of him was far from the norm. Aristotle was a controversial figure at the Universities of Oxford and Paris, meriting a series of Condemnations. The Condemnation of 1210 of the University of Paris (and similar events at Oxford) rejected Aristotle's *Physics* and related works due to apparent pantheism, denial of the immortality of the soul, and other doctrinal issues.[20] But theologians at the school were still allowed to read the forbidden works. The early Condemnation was ineffective, so it was followed by the Condemnations of 1270 and 1277. Defenders of Aristotle had their work cut out for them. Eventually they would prevail, prompting Dante (1265–1321) to call Aristotle "the master of those who know."[21]

In 1214, St. Dominic founded an order based on the rule of St. Augustine and dedicated to study for the sake of preaching and the saving souls. Two years later, the Order of Preachers was approved and recognized. In 1217, Dominic sent seven followers to the University of Paris to establish a priory dedicated to study. He did the same for Oxford a few years later. In 1243, at

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[19] Irene Zavattero, "Moral and Intellectual Virtues in the Earliest Latin Commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics*," In *Virtue Ethics in the Middle Ages: Commentaries on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, 1200–1500*, ed. Istvan P. Bejczy (Boston: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2008), 31.

[20] Aristotle and Averoist commentaries denied such doctrines as God as a passive unmoved mover, that there is numerical one intellect for ll humans, that the separated soul cannot suffer from bodily fire, that God cannot grant immortality to mortals, that God cannot know singulars, that human acts are not ruled by Providence, and more. Thijssen, Hans, "Condemnation of 1277", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/condemnation/>. See also Rubenstein, Richard E. *Aristotle's Children: How Christians, Muslims, and Jews Rediscovered Ancient Wisdom and Illuminated the Middle Ages* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004), 215–217.

[21] *il maestro di color che sanno*.

age nineteen, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) secretly joined the Dominican Order against his family's wishes. He was sent to study at the University of Paris in 1245, after his studies at the University of Naples and a short house-arrest by his family. At Paris, he came under the tutelage of the newly appointed master of studies, Albertus Magnus. Three years later, Albert was sent to Cologne, and Thomas followed him, remaining under his tutelage. Albert later appointed Thomas master of studies, which Thomas took reluctantly. In 1252, he returned to Paris, and in 1256 was appointed master of theology.

Albert's work helped prepare the way for Aquinas. Although Aquinas first came into contact with Aristotle at Naples, it was under Albert that he learned to appreciate Aristotle's scientific method.[22] Both of them would set themselves the task of showing how Aristotle could transform theology. Albert attempted to summarize Aristotle's works and fill in gaps with his own work with faithful adherence to Aristotelian logic applied to theology. He adopted an Aristotelian philosophical-scientific program subordinated to the Christian Neoplatonic tradition that followed Augustine.[23] Philosophy was not merely ancillary to theology but involved the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake — all knowledge — since God is the author of all. He still saw all of reality in Neoplatonic categories, but he used the scientific insights of Aristotle for the study of causes in natural science using empirical evidence. Albert's appropriation of Aristotle was essentially a greatly expanded version of the prior scholastic method, utilizing the full *Organon* instead of just *Categories*. Because of this, he is well known as being a student of astronomy, biology, logic, and math.

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[22] McInerny, Ralph and John O'Callaghan, "Saint Thomas Aquinas", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/aquinas/>.

[23] Führer, Markus, "Albert the Great", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/albert-great/>.

Thanks to Albert's work, Christian theologians became less averse to Aristotle, but the task of fully synergizing the Aristotelian method with Christian theology fell to his intellectual heir. Like Aristotle to Plato, Aquinas would filter out much of his teacher's Platonism for a more faithful and comprehensive appropriation of Aristotle in theology.[24] In doing so, Aquinas would produce the first true systematic theology, the *Summa Theologiæ.* Contained in its pages, along with his other works, were a sustained defense of Christianized Aristotelianism.

Aquinas in Defense of Aristotle

Those who accepted Aristotle on every point were called "Avveroists" because of their dependance on Muslim commentaries, for which Averoes is referrd to as "The Commentator." Aristotle is referred to, at least by Aquinas, as "The Philosopher." Those rejecting the innovations of Aristotle were called "Augustinians." The Franciscans were also known for their rejection of Aristotle at the time. Those appropriating Aristotle as much as possible became known as "orthodox Aristotelians" and eventually "Thomists," though Thomas himself defends and uses Augustine with a great deal of frequency. After Thomas, opposition came to include Ockhamists, Scotists, and Bonaventurians.

What did Aquinas see in Aristotle that others around him did not? In short, he saw the beauty of the unity of knowledge pursued with the rigor of demonstrative arguments using the tools of Aristotelian empiricism and logic. It was not that previous theology was bad. To the contrary, Aquinas relies heavily on giants like Augusitne, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Boethius. But he also saw in Aristotle tools that could transform theology. Theology could develop doctrines of God with more clarity instead of only by way of mystic contemplation of the mysteries of God.

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[24] To be clear, Aquinas is not strictly an Aristotelian. He also appropriates much of Plato and Augustine's Neoplatonism. The cardinal virtues, for example, come from Plato.

The literal (not literalistic) meaning of Scriptures could be studied with care.[25] Of course, some

thought this was not a good thing, preferring to keep God a mystery. To make him the object of a

science would bring him low and undermine his transcendence and mystery, a point still

emphasized excessively in Eastern Orthodoxy today. You will be hard pressed even today to find

an Orthodox systematic theology. Aquinas, however, saw a possibility to maintain both a

scientific knowledge of God and preserve his transcendence.

With the Condemnations of the University of Paris, and Fransiscan and Avveroist

opposition, Albert and Aquinas had their work cut out for them. Ralph McInerny says, "In two

stints as a regent master Thomas defended the mendicant orders and, of greater historical

importance, countered both the Averroistic interpretations of Aristotle and the Franciscan

tendency to reject Greek philosophy. The result was a new *modus vivendi* [way of life] between

faith and philosophy which survived until the rise of the new physics."[26]

Upon the death of Thomas in 1274, his writings immediately came under attack by

Franciscans while being defended by Dominicans.[27] Dominicans have henceforth been Thomistic

while Franciscans generally are not. Later centuries found opposition by Bonaventurians,

Scotists, and Ockhamists, but the Catholic Church as a whole has always kept pride of place for

the Angelic Doctor. More recently the *Aeterni Patris* of 1879 by Pope Leo XIII called for a

Thomistic revival, to be championed as "the paladin of philosophy" against the modernist

tradition stemming from Descartes, though this revival was shut down by Vatican II in

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[25] Carroll clarifies that Aquinas would not interpret the Bible literalistically: "Thomas was a firm adherent to the medieval [Augustinian] principle that 'Scripture is the interpreter of Scripture.' . . . As we can see in the first question of the *Summa,* Thomas would reject any kind of biblical literalism since, for him, the literal sense contains metaphors, similies, and other literary forms" (233).

[26] McInerny, Ralph and John O'Callaghan, "Saint Thomas Aquinas", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/aquinas/>.

[27] McInerny, Ralph and John O'Callaghan, "Saint Thomas Aquinas", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2018/entries/aquinas/>.

1962–65.[28] In 1998, John Paul II issued *Fides et Ratio*, reaffirming the importance of Aquinas for Catholics. While the last half of the twentieth century has seen Catholics divided on Aquinas, Protestants have displayed a renewed interest in him as central rather than ancillary.

<center>**II. Theology as a Science**</center>

The history of the recovery of Aristotle paints the picture generally of how scholasticism came to maturity in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and specifically how Aquinas helps transform theology into a science.

Platonic Hermeneutics Without Aristotle

Theology without Aristotle was influenced by Platonism through its early interactions with Stoicism, Epicureanism, gnosticism, and eventually Neoplatonism. Idiosyncratic Greek thought is even present throughout the New Testament, such as ubiquitous virtue lists, and the "Logos" of Heraclitus and the Stoics being directly attacked, adopted, and transformed by St. John the Evangelist. A popular Platonic doctrine claims that the material world is a less dignified and distant reflection of what is most real. Gnosticism took this to the point of claiming that matter was evil or that one's licentious carnal life was disconnected from one's philosophical life, a point that drove Augustine away from Manichaeism. Meanwhile, Christianity attempted to filter Platonism through orthodox doctrine. The effect on biblical interpretation was that truth was seen as primarily mystical, distant, and accessible through contemplation. For Plotinus, union with The One was achieved not through *knowing* but through surpassing knowledge in a religious experience.[29] Augustine certainly did not agree, but Plotinus's influence is still undeniable, not all of which was bad and some even carries on through Aquinas. Neoplatonism

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[28] Ibid.
[29] Plotinus, *Enneads* VI.9.4.

influenced the early church view of contemplation as emphasizing mystical experience, not contemplation as the scholastic practice of rigorous textual analysis.

Early church contemplation was practiced through *lectio divina*. This process included reading (*lectio*) Scripture, meditation (*meditatio*, what does the text say to me in my life?), prayer (*oratio*, my response to the Lord), and contemplation (*contemplatio*, resting in God's presence and asking what I should do next). This practice was meant to bring one closer to God, seeking union with him, and acting on one's faith. Contemplation in this sense aims at immersing oneself in the text "in order to be transformed by it and thus advance on a road towards greater holiness."[30] It is a good devotional practice even today, but as a hermeneutic its emphasis on mysticism encourages the allegorical interpretation of Scripture and eisegesis. This influence is apparent in the devotional classics of Bonaventure's *Journey of the Mind to God*, St. John of the Cross's *Dark Knight of the Soul*, or Teresa of Ávila's *Interior Castle*. All of these use mystical contemplation and heavy use of allegory with minimal Scripture and no exegesis. If ultimate truth was seen as a distant reality, the main goal in textual interpretation was to see the truer, more spiritual hidden meaning beyond the text. Before Aquinas, "biblical exegetes operated in the intellectual context of Neoplatonism and sought, accordingly, to look for exemplar [allegorical] and final causality. The visible world and human history were viewed as symbols of spiritual realities known through illumination."[31] This influence would last well into the medieval church and would influence its reluctance to let commoners read the words of God for themselves. As Nicholas Healy explains:

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[30] Carroll, 222.
[31] Carroll, 223.

The visible surface of the text, its "literal sense," was regarded as of secondary importance compared with its invisible depths, for it was in the latter [that] the true meaning of the text lay, through which one might ascend towards God. The monks thus tended to read through or around the literal meaning of the words in order to discern their more significant "spiritual" meaning.[32]

Augustine is rightly seen as a theological giant and a profound Christian philosopher — the best of his time and for a long time to come. His *On Christian Doctrine* inspires one to read Scripture prayerfully and thoughtfully. His *Confessions* is a wonderful picture of a wayfarer on the pilgrimage of growing towards mature Christian thinking carried along by divine illumination. He begins with a God-shaped hole in his heart, restless until resting in God. His journey takes him through a phase of the best man can offer on his own rational ability in philosophy and eventually comes to divinely illuminated reason in the contemplation of God. This is illustrated in the oft ignored last last few chapters of the *Confessions* where Augustine allegorically interprets Genesis 1:18, "Be fruitful and multiply," as referring to fruitfulness of mind.

I do not see what objection there is to my thus interpreting the figurative words of your book. . . . If, therefore, we think of the natures of things not allegorically but literally, the word 'increase and multiply' applies to all creatures generated by seeds. But if we treat the text as figurative (which I prefer to think scripture intended . . .), then we find multitudes in the spiritual and physical creations (to which 'heaven and earth' refer); in both just and unjust souls (called 'light and darkness'); in the holy authors through whom the law is ministered (called 'the firmament' established solidly between water and water); in the association of people filled with bitterness ('the sea'); in the zeal of devoted souls ('the dry land'); . . . in spiritual gifts which manifest themselves for edification (the 'heavenly lights'); in affections disciplined through self-control ('the living soul').[33]

With such allegory, anything is possible. Indeed, Augustine himself repeatedly claims that there is a "diversity of true views" and seems unsure of "whatever you were intending to reveal to later readers by those words . . . even if it were the case that Moses, through whom this

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[32] Nicholas M. Healy, "Introduction," *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to His Biblical Commentaries.* Ed. Thomas G. Weinandy, Daniel A. Keating, and John P. Yocum (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 7; quoted in Carroll, 222.

[33] Augustine, *Confessions,* trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), XIII.37.

was said, had in mind perhaps only one out of the many true interpretations."[34] It is eisegesis, not exegesis, and one can easily allegorize the text to weaponize the Bible in defense of personal agendas. There is a long history of doing just that. It would be a straw man to say that all pre-scholastic interpretation was allegorical or to demonize *lectio divina*, which is actually a spiritual gem when used appropriately. I cannot now survey early hermeneutical methods or do them justice in articulating their specific pros and cons. Rather, the point is to illustrate that early church theology was a bit lacking in tools to resolve disputes. While the goal of having spiritual union with God is good, mysticism obscures the meaning of texts, skipping over much of its intent. Again, I acknowledge that this is an oversimplification for the sake of brevity, for tremendous advancements in theology occurred before the twelfth century, and mystic classics are still well worth the read.

The point still stands that the Platonic approach to biblical interpretation overemphasizes the spiritual meaning of the invisible realm at the expense of taking seriously the visible, material, contextual, and literal meaning of texts. By contrast, Aristotle's empirical immediate sense realism uses the observation of evidence to develop demonstrative proofs in a well ordered scientific method that is subject to the rules of logic. As Aquinas says, we start with what is most well known to our senses and move to what is less well known.[35]

Aristotelian Logic

The influence of Aristotle on biblical interpretation rests primarily on his development of the definition of a science, the order and relationship of the sciences, and logic. Human reason begins with observation. Noting similarities in things, the active intellect abstracts universal concepts, discussed in Aristotle's *Categories*. The first distinction to be made is between

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[34] Augustine, *Confessions*, XII.41–43.
[35] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ* 1.2.3.

essential and nonessential qualities of things, which points to things having essences, or natures.[36] As *On Interpretation* tells us, the understanding of universals is the first act of the mind.[37] The second act combines universals into subject and predicate to make judgements in the form of truth claims. Further combining such propositions is the role of the third act of mind, reason. Reason pursues knowledge of causes through discursive arguments. Aristotle said that wisdom is in knowing causes.[38] Reasoning can be use inductive pattern recognition that yields probabilistic conclusions or deductive proofs that yield conclusions with certaintly.[39]

Armed with some understanding of human reason and logic, we can discuss what an Aristotelian science is. A science is constituted by three components: a subject, foundational principles, and demonstrated conclusions.[40] The goal of science is to know truth, which is defined as conformity of the intellect to reality.[41] Knowledge starts with observation, not Platonic introspective recollection nor mystical contemplation. To start a science, we begin with what is most well known to our senses, namely the material universe, which is the *subject* of physics. At this early stage, its *foundational principles* must be self-evident axioms. When considering whether God's existence is self-evident, Aquinas says:

> I answer that, a thing can be self-evident in either of two ways: on the one hand, self-evident in itself, though not to us; on the other, self-evident in itself, and to us. A proposition is self-evident because the predicate is included in the essence of the subject, as "Man is an animal," for animal is contained in the essence of man. If, therefore the essence of the predicate and subject be known to all, the proposition will be self-evident to all; as is clear with regard to the first principles of demonstration, the terms of which are common things that no one is ignorant of, such as being and non-being, whole and

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[36] Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* I.3–4.
[37] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I (980b26).
[38] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I.2 (98214–5).
[39] Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* I.1.
[40] Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 72a.; Rollen E. Houser, "Essence and Existence in Ibn SÍná," in *The Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy,* eds. Richard C. Taylor and Luis Xavier López-Farjeat (London: Routledge, 2016), 213. Note that Ibn Sina is Avicenna. For more detail on the science of metaphysics and the order of the sciences, see John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2000).
[41] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1011b25; See also Thomas Aquinas, *Questiones Disputatae de Veritate* 1.1.

part, and such like. If, however, there are some to whom the essence of the predicate and subject is unknown, the proposition will be self-evident in itself, but not to those who do not know the meaning of the predicate and subject of the proposition. Therefore, it happens, as Boethius says . . . "that there are some mental concepts self-evident only to the learned, as that incorporeal substances are not in space." Therefore I say that this proposition, "God exists," of itself is self-evident, for the predicate is the same as the subject, because God is His own existence as will be hereafter shown (ST I.3.4). Now because we do not know the essence of God, the proposition is not self-evident to us; but needs to be demonstrated by things that are more known to us, though less known in their nature—namely, by effects.[42]

"Self-evident" does not mean that all people know them. Since the beginning, "self-evident" has had the distinctions of "self-evident in itself" (predicate contained in the subject), "self-evident to all," (e.g., do good and avoid evil), and "self-evident to the wise" upon reflection. This last category could include the principle of causality or other principles of logic. Once understood, a person knows that it cannot be otherwise.[43]

Principles for physics include the three fundamental laws of logic: excluded middle, bivalence, and identity.[44] We should also include the principle of causality, that all things have a cause, and the implied principle of sufficient reason, which extends also to God's uncaused *per se* existence. The principle of causality may be split into the four causes. Armed with *principles* and having identified a *subject*, observation leads into demonstrative proofs following the principles of logic and yielding *demonstrated conclusions*.

From physics we can learn of universals, the ten categories, essences, the existence of the soul, God's existence, and more. Demonstrated conclusions are included in the principles of the next higher science. Where the subject of physics is matter, the subject of math is numbers, which is one step removed from dealing with matter but still refers indirectly to it. Next comes metaphysics, completely removed from matter. In a lateral sense, physics also generates ethics

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[42] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ* I.2.1, Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Benziger Bros., 1948.

[43] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ* I.2.1.

[44] See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV.3.1005b23-24; IV.3.1005b19-20; V.6.1011b13-14; VII.17.1041a16–18; *Topics*, I.7.103a19-20; *On Interpretation* V.6.1011b13-14

then politics based on the natural law. Each science builds on previous conclusions and still uses previous principles. It was not until after the Enlightenment that the sciences became disconnected from each other.

After metaphysics, the last science is theology, which does not abandon metaphysics, or any of the other sciences but includes them. To be the most accurate, Aristotle did not call the study of *being as being* "metaphysics." He called it "theology" or "first philosophy."[45] Aquinas separated theology from metaphysics, saying that metaphysics is the highest man can attain on natural reason, whereas one combines the conclusions of metaphysics with Scripture to form the beginning principles of theology. When considering the question, "Is sacred doctrine a science?" Aquinas says:

> I answer that, sacred doctrine is a science. We must bear in mind that there are two kinds of sciences. There are some which proceed from a principle known by the natural light of intelligence, such as arithmetic and geometry and the like. There are some which proceed from principles known by the light of a higher science: thus the science of perspective proceeds from principles established by geometry, and music from principles established by arithmetic. So it is that sacred doctrine is a science because it proceeds from principles established by the light of a higher science, namely, the science of God and the blessed. Hence, just as the musician accepts on authority the principles taught him by the mathematician, so sacred science is established on principles revealed by God.[46]

As the order of the sciences progresses from physics to metaphysics then to theology, the conclusions of each science are added as foundational principles of the next higher science. With theology, we have the benefit of revelation *adding* to the principles of lower sciences, *not replacing* them. Theology as a science uses human reason just as all other sciences, so the discussion of the unity of faith and reason is almost laughable. Faith steps in temporarily to add revealed principles to what reason is already doing and will eventually pass away and become knowledge, or sight in the beatific vision. Both faith and reason aim at knowledge of truth. As

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[45] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VI.1.
[46] Aquinas, *Summa Theolgiae* I.1.2.

Aquinas says, "God never proposes through the Apostles and the prophets anything that is contrary to what reason indicates, although He does propose what exceeds the power of reason to comprehend."[47] As William Carroll Explains:

> Such argumentation [of doctrinal disputation] is only possible because *sacra doctrina* is truly a science: it is an intellectual whole in which one can discover necessary connections amongst its parts, even though a recognition of the ultimate truth of revelation depends on faith. . . . For Thomas faith perfects reason, so *sacra doctrina* can perfect all other sciences. Such perfecting is not an elimination or destruction of these sciences; it is rather a recognition that human reason has limits to its scope. One of Thomas's favorite phrases is applicable here: grace does not destroy nature but perfects it. . . . *Sacra doctrina* explores the new intelligibility of all reality as it is revealed by God, who is the beginning and the end. All knowledge based on reason alone can only provide an incomplete (but certainly not a false) view of reality.[48]

As the Reformer Richard Hooker (1554–1600) says:

> Even though Scripture says that it contains all things necessary for salvation, "all things" cannot be construed to mean absolutely "all things," but all things of a certain kind, such as all things which we could not know by our natural reason. Scripture does indeed contain all these things. However, it also presupposes that we first know and are persuaded of certain rational first principles, and building on that, Scripture teaches us the rest.[49]

The subject of theology in a narrow sense is only the doctrine of God, but the doctrine of God builds on and transforms all lower sciences. Ethics, for example, is transformed by being entirely based upon the character of God and directed to him as its end. It can be properly called *moral theology*. Whereas *ethics* in the Aristotelian sense is properly an offshoot of physics as it focuses on the natural law. Christians agree, but add understanding of our *super*natural end, being directed beyond our nature to something we cannot attain without the aid of something *above* our nature revealing to us what we cannot know by natural reason and enabling us to believe it. Aristotle saw ethics as an extension of biology (*De Anima*), the study of the natural norms of how things are to function. The difference is in that rational animals are aware of the

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[47] Aquinas, *Questions Disputatae De Veritate* 14.10, ad 7; quoted in Carroll 229.
[48] Carroll, 230–231.
[49] Richard Hooker, *Divine Law and Human Nature: Book I of Hooker's Laws: A Modernization*, trans. W. Bradford Littlejohn, Brian Marr, and Bradley Belschner (Davenant Press, 2017), 81.

natural law and may intentionally act against it. There is a natural progression in reading

Aristotle's *Organon, Physics, On the Soul* (*De Anima*)*, Nicomachean Ethics,* and *Politics.*[50]

Moral theology is still based on the natural law, but it sees the natural law as founded on

the character of God and directed to him. With Aristotle, we can see that this far back in the

history of ethics, there was not a division between "the laws of nature," like gravity (or the

spheres), and the "natural law" that is the basis of ethics. The two were the same. This is still

properly true in Christianity. It was not until David Hume and G. E. Moore introduced the

"Is-Ought" problem or so called "naturalistic fallacy" that "goodness" became popularly seen as

a non-natural "intuited" quality, a thesis that is so thoroughly accepted in the secular world that

they see it as not worth talking about. Unfortunately, most moral theologians today do the same

without realizing it because they have not been taught the rich history of the natural law within

Christianity. But I digress.

Aristotelian Hermeneutics

With a taste of how Aristotelian logic can transform theology into a science, unified to all

other sciences by a consistent method and a unified metaphysic, we can see some of philosophy's

effect on theology. As a science, theology uses the principles of Aristotelian logic to move from

what is observed to understanding universal principles and eventually to the understanding of

causes through the use of demonstrative proofs. Added to the *disputatio* encouraged by

Lombard's collection, twelfth century theologians began debating theology with precise

demonstrative proofs that focused on logic and semantic precision. A modern analytic

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[50] Politics completes ethics because the fulfillment of eudaimonia is not in individual flourishing but the flourishing of the common good, which an individual possesses insofar as he is a member of it. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* X.9; *Politics* I.2; III.9.

philosopher would be surprised at how detailed scholastic semantic distinctions are, as seen in the Aquinas excerpt above explaining what "self-evident" means.

For theology, the Aristotelian method transforms hermeneutics. An Aristotelian hermeneutics, as opposed to a Platonic one, will seek to prove one's interpretation from the apparent facts of the observable text. "Aquinas's appropriation of Aristotle introduced a different perspective from which to examine God's Word. For Aquinas, human knowing is not possible without sense and imagination. Efficient and formal causality receive greater recognition. The world and history take on their own value; they are not just symbolic of a higher realm."[51] Just as Aristotle's empiricism verified the value of the material world, it also verified the value of the literal sense of a text, which would be applied to Scripture. "Thomas's position on the importance of the literal sense of Scripture puts him at odds with those who would see the text as merely a veil which had to be lifted in order to get at the inner and nobler spiritual message."[52] The goal was not only to gain union with God and advance one's holiness but to solve philosophical problems. Answers were to be found in the historical and literal meaning of texts. Difficulties and apparent contradictions in the Scripture or between theologians had to be solved with demonstrative arguments that clarified Scripture, not obscuring it for allegorical eisegesis.

Philosophy Transforms Theology Into a Science

Since theology is a cumulative science, in addition to interpreting Scripture, theologians have at their disposal the complete spectrum of human understanding. Proofs should accord with Scripture, but they need not rely solely upon it in forming doctrinal conclusions. A distinction Aquinas is clear on, however, is that if a conclusion comes from human reason alone, it is

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[51] Matthew Lamb, "Introduction," *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, Thomas Aquinas (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1966), 6.
[52] Carroll, 223.

philosophy, not theology.[53] To be theology, it must not only be about God, the subject of the science, but must come at least partially from Scriptural revelation, even if Scripture is only reaffirming what natural reason discovers (like nine of the Ten Commandments). This means that an Aristotelian will base theological proofs on concrete data present in the text. This does not mean one should be a biblicist, attaching a clear Bible verse to each doctrine. Just as the order of the sciences starts from observation of matter and gradually moves to invisible truths, so too theology may result in doctrinal language that appears quite foreign to the text. But the bread crumbs can still lead a theologian to see how the doctrine is solidly based in the text. An early example of this is the Trinitarian formula that God is one *substance* and three *persons*, language borrowed from Aristotle's *Categories*, not the Bible, though still a biblically based doctrine.

For a fuller example, in order to arrive at the claim that Charity, or divine love, is "the mother and the root of all the virtues," Aquinas works through a long process in his *Summa Theologiæ*.[54] He starts where all good systematic theologies should, the doctrine of God. This is primarily because God is the first cause. Whereas metaphysics starts from causes, epistemology starts with effects. We observe effects then work backwards to causes, which is what Aquinas does in proving the existence of God from physics.[55] He then goes on to use a series of Scriptural texts and texts from church fathers to demonstrate attributes of God, working from more fundamental attributes like immutability to relational attributes like love and the persons of the Trinity. Having understood the first cause, he moves on to his treatise on creation, what is caused, including defining evil as privation, which relies on Augustine and passages like Matthew 7:18.[56] Aquinas is establishing the first cause and how the natural order reflects the

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[53] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ* I.1.1.
[54] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ* I-II.62.4, see also II-II.23.6.
[55] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ* I.2.3.
[56] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ* I.49.1.

nature of the creator. Within this created order, Aquinas articulates at length a Christianized Aristotelian psychology, always interweaving Aristotle, church fathers, and Scriptures as principles for his proofs. Eventually he arrives at distinguishing types of law, namely eternal law (God's character), divine law (laws in revelation), natural law (the order of how God designed man to function), and man's law (aka. civic or positive law).

The scheme of how the different senses of law are related relies upon the understanding of God's essence and his creation already proven. It then lays the foundation of ethics. Aquinas goes on to show how each of the cardinal virtues relates to one of the basic powers of the soul, then he gleans the theological virtues from 1 Corinthians 13:13. It takes hundreds of pages, but eventually Aquinas has built up enough foundation for it to make sense for him to say that faith, hope, and love relate to essential acts of the human soul. Whereas faith and hope rely on a certain privation of possession of the thing believed or sought, love is active both in the absence and presence of the object because it is fulfilled in union with the object. It seeks the good of the whole subject by possession of the object, and this is why "both faith and hope are quickened by charity, and receive from charity their full complement as virtues."[57]

The purpose here is to illustrate that theology proper, the doctrine of God, depends on all prior sciences *and* revelation while also yielding implications that affect all lower sciences, like physics, psychology, ethics, politics, etc. Theology is the culmination of these and rests on them and in turn pours back into them and transforms them. Aristotelian logic maintains a natural unity to all sciences that reflects the unity of all knowledge because of the unity of God. Systematic theology is born when the loosely collected theological sayings of Lombard become an interconnected web of deductive arguments in Aquinas.

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[57] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ* I-II.62.4.

Philosophy is not a "handmaiden" that is an optional luxury, as a modern thinker might take the analogy. It is what prepares human reason to be able to do theology. Philosophy gets us fed and dressed in the morning so we can get to work talking about God. Theology as a science rests on philosophy. What we today call "Christian philosophy" is just theology. And what we call "theology" today is often theology divorced from all its prior sciences.

III. Is Theology Still a Science Today?

The Dominicans knew that the result of an Aristotelian hermeneutic would be a more faithful and clear preaching of the gospel. Aquinas frequently appealed directly to Scripture in his work as he did in his inaugural lecture as regent master in 1256: "Of these three offices, namly, to preach, to lecture, and to dispute, it is said in Titus 1:9, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to confute opponents."[58] The Order of the Preachers saw their tasks as faithfully studying the truths of the Scripture so they could faithfully preach it. In a real sense, the Reformation's emphasis on the centrality of the sermon, instead of its being marginalized as a short homily, is a recovery of the Dominican vision of exegesis and expository preaching. The method is to draw upon those who have gone before. Aquinas frequently cites church fathers or philosophers alongside Scripture when arguing theology, and so does Calvin in his *Institutes*.

A problem in the twenty-first century is that this exposition has lost some (but not all) of its *disputatio*, dialectic with theologians on whose shoulders we stand. *Disputatio* as it is in the best of sermons and commentaries today has been influenced by the modernist chronological snobbery and tendency of analytic philosophy to see all disputes as ahistorical. The result is that in some cases historic theology is rejected, but more often it is just forgotten. Like a person who never travels, today's theologian has a hard time seeing how their temporal and geographical

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[58] Quoted in Ralph McInerny, ed. *Thomas Aquinas: Selected Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 15.

situatedness limits their view. Do moral theologians today even know how to ask metaethical questions? Do systematic theologians even know what "substance" means in the formula "one substance and three persons"? We're living in the post-apocalypse of the *Canticle for Leibowitz* where advanced science was forgotten centuries ago, and we're left with disconnected fragments that make little sense divorced from the contexts which gave them meaning. Only in this fragmentary state can a conservative theologian get away with questioning divine simplicity, entertaining Christian Platonism, or deny the natural law. The problem is so pervasive that the attempt to retrieve historic theology is met with confusion or scorn. "Are you serious? You want to return to an Aristotelian view of essences?" That's a rhetorical question that could come from the mouth of a leading theologian at the Evangelical Theological Society just as well as from the mouth of an atheistic analytic philosopher at the American Philosophical Association.

But Aristotle started it all. Rather, Peter Lombard, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, and many others started it as they used the Aristotelian method to propagate scholasticism and transform theology into a science. Without this, we would not have systematic theology as we know it today—at least insofar as it takes after medieval scholasticism and not modernism.

So what do we do now? We use Aristotle. We do not reinvent the wheel. But we also do not prefer old things just because they are old. We are not Catholic or Orthodox. Something is true if it corresponds to reality, and we should prove it with demonstrative proofs that use Aristotelian logic. It *should* be the case that newer is better if we are continually building on the foundations of those who have gone before, just as in the order of the sciences. What would Aristotle say if you told him that philosophy does not significantly improve for the next 2,500 years? Scholasticism certainly took off after Aquinas, but it also immediately came under attack by Ockhamists, Scotists, Franciscans, Bonaventurians, and others. The Reformation saw a brief

renewal, limping as it did on the impoverished resources of the late Medieval Period. Then along

comes the Enlightenment to break its legs right as they healed stronger than they had been in the

past few hundred years. Have we recovered? Can we recover? What are we doing to recover?