

## An Introduction to the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas

### October 11

Introductions; Biography of Thomas; Why St. Thomas Matters; Philosophy and Theology; Your Questions (read McInerny, pp. ix-41)

### October 18

An Irresponsibly Sweeping View of Western Philosophy; Basic Concepts; Christian Philosophy? (handouts)

### October 25

What and Why? Things and Causes (pp. 42-65)

### November 1

Don't Just Sit There, Do Something! Motion and Becoming (pp. 66-98)

### November 8

From Nothing Comes Nothing: Creation and Creator (pp. 103-147)

### November 15

Only One is Good: The Human Person and Morality (pp. 149-180)

## Rough Chronology of Aquinas' Writings (1225-1274)

All told, Aquinas wrote or dictated about the same amount of words as the *Encyclopedia Britannica* – in addition to teaching university courses in Paris, Naples, and Bologna, and travels (largely on foot) between Paris, Rome, Cologne, and cities in Italy

1248 - *De Ente et Essentia*

1255 – *Contra Impugnantes Dei Cultum* (defense of religious against secular clergy in Paris)

1254-56 – Commentary on Lombard's *Four Books of Sentences*

1256 – Master of Theology (equivalent to a doctorate)

1256-59 – Disputed Question: *De Veritate*

1257-58 – Commentaries on Boethius' *De Trinitate* and *De Hebdomadibus*

1259-64 – *Summa Contra Gentiles* (commissioned by St. Raymond of Penyafort, Dominican Master General)

1261 – Commentary on Dionysius' *De Divinis Nominibus*

1261-64 – commissioned works: *Tract Contra Errores Graecorum*; *Tract De Rationibus Fidei contra Saracenos, Graecorum et Armenos*; Gospel Commentary *Catena Aurea*; *Tract De Regimine Judaeorum*

1265-67 – Disputed Question: *De Potentia Dei*

1265-73 – *Summa Theologiae*

1268 – Disputed Question: *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*

1269-70 – Disputed Question: *De Anima*

1270 – *De Unitate Intellectus contra Averroistas* (against the doctrine of Siger of Brabant)

1269-72 – Disputed Question: *De Malo*

1272 – Commentary on the anonymous *Liber De Causis*

1266-72 – Commentaries on Aristotle's *Ethics*, *Politics*, *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, and *Logic*

1273 – *Compendium Theologiae*

also, a number of "Quodlibetal Questions"; Sermons; Commentaries on Scripture; and the Liturgy of the new feast of *Corpus Christi* commissioned by Pope Urban IV (1264)

## Prologue

A small error at the outset can lead to great errors in the final conclusions, as the Philosopher says in I *De Caelo et Mundo* cap. 5 (271b8-13), and thus, since being and essence are the things first conceived of by the intellect, as Avicenna says in *Metaphysicae* I, cap. 6, in order to avoid errors arising from ignorance about these two things, we should resolve the difficulties surrounding them by explaining what the terms being and essence each signify and by showing how each may be found in various things and how each is related to the logical intentions of genus, species, and difference.

Since we ought to acquire knowledge of simple things from composite ones and come to know the prior from the posterior, in instructing beginners we should begin with what is easier, and so we shall begin with the signification of being and proceed from there to the signification of essence.

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In composite substances we find form and matter, as in man there are soul and body. We cannot say, however, that either of these is the essence of the thing. That matter alone is not the essence of the thing is clear, for it is through its essence that a thing is knowable and is placed in a species or genus. But matter is not a principle of cognition; nor is anything determined to a genus or species according to its matter but rather according to what something is in act. Nor is form alone the essence of a composite thing, however much certain people may try to assert this. From what has been said, it is clear that the essence is that which is signified by the definition of the thing. The definition of a natural substance, however, contains not only form but also matter; otherwise, the definitions of natural things and mathematical ones would not differ. Nor can it be said that matter is placed in the definition of a natural substance as something added to the essence or as some being beyond the essence of the thing, for that type of definition is more proper to accidents, which do not have a perfect essence and which include in their definitions a subject beyond their own genus. Therefore, the essence clearly comprises both matter and form.

Nor can it be said that essence signifies the relation between the matter and the form or something superadded to these, for then the essence would of necessity be an accident and extraneous to the thing, and the thing would not be known through its essence, contrary to what pertains to an essence. Through the form, surely, which is the act of the matter, the matter is made a being in act and a certain kind of thing. Thus, something that supervenes does not give to the matter existence in act simply, but rather existence in act in a certain way, just as accidents do, as when whiteness makes something actually white. Hence, when such a form is acquired, we do not say that the thing is generated simply but only in a certain way.

The only possibility, therefore, is that the term essence, used with respect to composite substances, signifies that which is composed of matter and form. This conclusion is consistent with what Boethius says in his commentary on the *Categories*, namely, that *ousia* signifies what

is composite; *ousia*, of course, is for the Greeks what essence is for us, as Boethius himself says in his book *De Persona et Duabus Naturis*. Avicenna even says, *Metaphysicae* V, cap. 5, that the quiddity of a composite substance is the very composition of the form and the matter. And commenting on Book VII of Aristotle's *Metaphysicae*, the Commentator says, "The nature that species in generable things have is something in the middle; that is, it is composed of matter and form." *Metaphysicae* VII, com. 27. Moreover, reason supports this view, for the existence of a composite substance is neither form alone nor matter alone but is rather composed of these. The essence is that according to which the thing is said to exist; hence, it is right that the essence by which a thing is denominated a being is neither form alone nor matter alone but both, albeit that existence of this kind is caused by the form and not by the matter.

...

We have thus made clear how essence is found in substances and in accidents, and how in composite substances and in simple ones, and in what way the universal intentions of logic are found in all of these, except for the first being, which is the extreme of simplicity and to which, because of its simplicity, the notions of genus, species, and thus definition do not apply; and having said this we may make an proper end to this discourse. Amen.