
On the Training of Thomists

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The period since Vatican II has seen a dramatic decline of interest in studying Aquinas among graduate students. Thirty years ago, there may not have been as much interest in Aquinas as we would have liked, but there was much more than there is now. Those who were in Catholic graduate schools then, whether as students or teachers, can testify to this change from their own experience. Those who were not there then could verify this change for themselves by, for example, comparing the number of courses in Aquinas offered at Catholic graduate schools then and now.

The reasons for the decline of interest in Aquinas are varied and complex, and not all the reasons are in the control of educators. But I will argue that there are things teachers of Thomism should have been doing a generation ago which would have resulted in greater interest in Aquinas today, and doing these things now will result in greater interest in the future. Much of what Thomistic educators have been doing is excellent, and my main purpose is not to criticize. I am making a positive proposal for improving the teaching of Thomism at the graduate level, a proposal designed to increase interest in studying Aquinas not only among present students, but even more importantly, among future students, that is, among the students of our present students. The proposal is designed to produce students who can interest their students in studying Aquinas.

I

The way graduate students were taught in the sixties was in part a reaction against the tradition of manual Scholasticism still in existence prior to Vatican II. Quentin Quesnell has recently given us a description of that milieu:

This Scholastic thought world was one that put an extraordinary premium on logic, clarity, the mechanics of exposition, on precise divisions and subdivisions of the material. It presupposed the possibility of perfect and exact definitions of everything. . . . The chain of reasoning can always be followed, if one has the patience and stamina to pursue it. This was its

strength but also its weakness. For so much emphasis on form could easily allow form to replace substance. Ideas and names are always sharper and clearer than reality, and a world of definitions, divisions and logic could soon become a world of words alone. It was obvious that the system was not devised to promote innovation.¹

Quesnell had seminary education specifically in mind, and it would be a mistake to think that this picture represents *all* Thomistic education prior to Vatican II—far from it. At my undergraduate institution, for example, many students were exposed to original works of Aristotle and Aquinas, not to mention the works of non-Thomist philosophers. Still, the manual tradition did contribute to the decline of interest in Aquinas. But even though Thomists have forsaken the manual tradition, they have not found a way to generate the kind of interest Aquinas deserves to enjoy.

Quesnell points to another failing of the manual tradition that the graduate education of thirty years ago was designed to correct: “You did not do independent historical research, reading through the originals in the context of their own times” (p. 148). In part as a remedy for the manual tradition’s *ahistoricism*, the graduate education of Thomists preceding Vatican II usually focused on studying Aquinas’s own texts. The professors were concerned to establish the correct interpretation of Aquinas’s texts in their historical context, often in opposition to an incorrect interpretation of one of the classical commentators or of some modern Thomist.

This historical-textual approach to Thomism, however, was not the only alternative to the manual tradition. As we all know, the twentieth-century produced many Thomists who were neither manualists nor textual commentators but thinkers who philosophized Thomistically. They were men and women with philosophical questions who found answers to those questions in Aquinas. Their work showed how truths they found in Aquinas answered questions posed by modern philosophy. Their method was not to defend one reading of his texts against other readings but to show how philosophical conclusions could be established from the data of experience.

This philosophical approach to Thomism, however, was seriously neglected in the graduate education of thirty years ago. To see how thoroughly it was neglected, consider the following: in three years of graduate education at two highly regarded schools, the universities of

1. Quentin Quesnell, “A Note on Scholasticism,” in *The Desires of the Human Heart: An Introduction to the Theology of Bernard Lonergan*, ed. Vernon Gregson (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), p. 149.

Toronto and the University of Notre Dame, I was not once required to read a modern Thomist. Studying Thomism meant studying the texts of Aquinas to the exclusion of studying any of his disciples. Occasionally, modern Thomists would be recommended in class, but the professors did not require the students to read any of them. And when the professors did mention modern Thomists, it was to criticize their interpretations of Aquinas at least as often as to recommend reading them. The professors were pursuing a historical approach; they were interested in establishing the correct interpretation of the texts of Aquinas, and they were interested in modern Thomists as interpreters of Aquinas, not as philosophers who had truths about reality to teach us. Modern Thomists were only secondary sources; and as good historical scholars, our job was to go to the primary sources.

If a random sampling of courses at two of the best Thomistic graduate schools is insufficient to establish that the philosophical approach to Thomism was being neglected in favor of the historical-textual approach, there is other evidence. For example, one could examine the Thomistic publications from the generation preceding Vatican II, whose authors were the teachers of that period, and the generation following Vatican II, whose authors were the students of that period. The examination would show that textual analyses predominate among those publications.² The fact is that in the second half of this century Thomists have produced far less literature of a creative philosophical character than in the first half. As Ralph McInerny said to me sometime in the mid-sixties, "What I want to know is where are the big Thomists of this generation." But should we have expected anything else, if young Thomists were not required to study models of Thomism done philosophically? How could we have expected them to learn and integrate Thomism philosophically, if they were not required to experience creative and philosophical Thomism?

Maritain apparently agreed with this assessment of Thomistic publications. In *The Peasant of the Garonne*, he criticized Thomists for not producing enough literature of "genuine philosophic value" and for instead producing literature that "possessed neither the gait and method, nor the light characteristic of philosophical research."³ These remarks occur in a discussion of the manual tradition; his example is Gredt. But Maritain was aware of all the excellent historical research on Aquinas published since the time of Gredt. If he thought that those historical

2. And even when the intent of a work is to make a philosophical argument, the philosophy is often obscured by the historical and textual content.

3. Jacques Maritain, *The Peasant of the Garonne*, trans. Michael Cuddihy and Elizabeth Hughes (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1968), p. 136.

studies made up for the lack of genuine philosophical value in the manuals, he should have said so. (And since Gilson's *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy* is one of the few books, along with Garrigou-Lagrange's *La Philosophie de l'être et le sens commun*, Maritain put in the category of excellent *philosophy*,⁴ he did not have a narrow conception of what constitutes philosophy and what constitutes history.)

In other words, Maritain was implying that neither the manual tradition nor the historical-textual approach are sufficient to make Thomism a living philosophy. The philosophical approach is also necessary. This is not to say that the philosophical approach should replace the historical. The historical-textual approach is not only valid but necessary.⁵ For example, we owe our awareness of the importance of *esse* to the historical insights of Thomists like Gilson and Fabro. But the experience of the second half of this century has shown that the historical approach is not sufficient for training Thomists who can make Thomism live as a philosophy with the position of influence it should have in our culture and in the Church.

II

In particular, neither the manual tradition nor the historical approach is sufficient to maintain the kind of interest among students that Aquinas deserves. At the two schools mentioned above, for example, many students expressed a loss of interest in Aquinas because they were encountering contemporary questions that interested them, and Aquinas—at least the Aquinas they were learning about—did not appear to answer those questions.

But if the professors had required them to study modern Thomists in addition to studying Aquinas, those students could have learned that Aquinas can provide answers to modern questions. For in order to get those answers from Aquinas, one has to do more than understand his texts. One has to put two and two together; one has to transpose truths into contexts different from those where one finds them in Aquinas; one has to see the significance of Thomistic truths from a fresh perspective.

For example, Maritain recognized that Aquinas's distinction between things as things and things as objects is the crux of the problem of realism, in general, and the problem of the correspondence theory of truth, in particular.⁶ But the texts of Aquinas do not apply the thing-

4. *Ibid.*, 136 n. 7.

5. See, for example, Maritain's remarks on history in philosophical education; *ibid.*, p. 137.

6. See Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (New

object distinction to those problems. For another example, Deely showed that intentional existence, not entitative existence, is the locus for dialogue between Thomism and Heidegger.⁷ But Aquinas rarely refers to intentional existence by name. Yves R. Simon found his solution to the problem of civil government in a subtle distinction of Aquinas's concerning the relation of an individual's will to God's.⁸ But not having Simon's precisely formulated questions in mind, few readers would have found what Simon found in that text. For another example, the *De Ente et Essentia*'s distinction between natures absolutely considered and their two *esses* can help solve Quine's problem of ontological relativity.⁹ But the connection between the formulas of the *De Ente et Essentia* and Quine's position is far from immediately obvious.

That Thomistic truths are so fecund is a testimony to their profundity and universality. Training in textual analysis alone, however, does not equip us to actualize the potential of Thomistic truths. Nor can any training guarantee it. But exposure to thinkers who philosophize Thomistically is a *de facto* necessary condition for students to develop that ability. The alternative is to focus on the texts of Aquinas in one class and on contemporary philosophy in another, making appropriate cross-references. That strategy is used, but it is not adequate for students to be able to deal Thomistically with contemporary questions. I have just mentioned one reason why: to understand how Aquinas can help us solve contemporary problems, we often have to see Thomistic truths from new perspectives. Another reason is that attempting to deal with modern questions Thomistically without knowledge of prior attempts to do so creates the problem of reinventing the wheel, with the inevitable false starts.

For example, Sandra Edwards recently defended Aquinas's position on universals against some of its modern critics.¹⁰ She displayed a

York: Scribners, 1959), pp. 71-108; on the correspondence theory of truth, see p. 97 n. 2.

7. See John N. Deely, *The Tradition via Heidegger* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971).

8. See Yves R. Simon, *Philosophy of Democratic Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 40-41.

9. See John C. Cahalan, *Causal Realism: An Essay on Philosophical Method and the Foundations of Knowledge* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1985), pp. 247-52. *Causal Realism* also shows the not immediately obvious connections between other Thomistic doctrines and a number of modern problems: the doctrine that the genus is only logically distinct from the species and the problem of deriving metaphysical concepts from sense experience (pp. 414-17); the doctrine of *per se nota* propositions and Quine's critique of analytic truth (pp. 69-76); the doctrine of material causality and Hume's critique of the knowability of efficient causality (pp. 277-92).

10. "The Realism of Aquinas," *The New Scholasticism* 69:1 (Winter 1985): 79-101.

grasp of contemporary issues and the ability to defend her position philosophically. But she reached the conclusion that Duns Scotus's theory of universals, especially the formal distinction between the nature as such and the *haecceitas* of the individual, not only is consistent with Aquinas's theory but also is able to resolve ambiguities in Aquinas's position.¹¹ The later Scholastics, however, had discussed the positions of Scotus and Aquinas on universals at length, and Edwards does not even refer to them. Poinset, in particular, is well known for having shown, against Scotus, that universality requires only a negative unity of non-division, a unity a nature has in the mind, not a formal unity outside the mind.¹² If Edwards was aware of the number of modern Thomists influenced by Poinset, she should have defended her position against his. But instead of going to a "secondary source" like him, this competent scholar had to try, unsuccessfully, to reinvent the wheel.

I do not cite this example to show that we should return to the traditional commentators as interpreters of Aquinas. Correct interpretation is not the only thing at stake; the ability of Thomists to interest future students in studying Aquinas is also at stake. To develop that ability, present students need models of Thomism done philosophically. The commentators often provide such models. Quesnell points out a crucial difference between the Scholasticism he criticizes and the kind of Scholasticism found in the commentators: modern Scholasticism was a method of exposition; classical Scholasticism was a technique of investigation and research.¹³ Many of the later Scholastics were

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

12. *The Material Logic of John of St. Thomas*, trans. Yves R. Simon, John J. Glanville, and G. Donald Hollenhorst (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), pp. 102-114, 130-40. Concerning the ambiguities Edwards mentions, Poinset could have taught her that Socrates's and Plato's *individual* natures are only similar, not identical, outside the mind. But Poinset would also say that their natures are *specifically* identical, the content of an abstracted concept being identical, as far as it goes, with what each individual is, and that Socrates's and Fido's individual natures are *generically* identical. Specific and generic identity may seem paradoxical to modern logicians for whom the identity of an individual with itself is the paradigm of identity. But Aquinas's doctrine implies that specific and generic identity are epistemologically prior to individual identity. Identity is a logical relation characterizing an individual because it has become an object of knowledge. And the specific or generic universal, not the individual, is what first falls under the apprehension of the intellect. Before intellection, the senses know individuals, but they do not know the relations of individuality or identity. Knowledge of those relations requires the intellectual grasp of specific or generic natures, and the corresponding grasp of identity between what the content of an abstracted concept is and what a sensed thing is.

13. See Quesnell, "A Note on Scholasticism," p. 145.

doing textual interpretation. But they were also concerned about philosophical issues, and they developed their interpretations while dealing with those issues. They sometimes misinterpreted significantly—as has every modern interpreter that I am aware of. But doctrinal purity, as important as it is, does not fulfill the need to show how Thomism can deal with philosophical problems, good or bad, that people actually have, or the need to produce students who can continue to show that. If graduate programs required students to read modern Thomists, the students would probably encounter Thomists who made use of philosophical insights from the commentators. And such students would be much less likely to try to reinvent the wheel.

III

Quesnell's description of the manual tradition in seminary education provides further evidence that modern Thomists who pursued the philosophical approach to Thomism were often ignored, and not only in graduate schools. What many students saw of Thomism was either the manual tradition, on the one hand, or historical-textual analysis, on the other. Since the purpose of Quesnell's article was to provide background for discussing Lonergan, reading Quesnell could give the impression that Lonergan's Thomism was a needed remedy for the manual tradition, as if no other alternative was available. In fact, the quality of Thomism prior to Vatican II was far higher than one might think just from reading Quesnell. And for many of us, the best Thomism was superior in intellectual quality to much of the philosophical and dogmatic theology done since Vatican II. I am not talking about whether one agrees with a particular theologian's positions; I am talking about the intellectual caliber of the way he or she arrives at and defends those positions. One does not have to be a Thomist, or even a theist, to share this view of the current state of the Church's intellectual life. Describing the contemporary Catholic thinkers he was familiar with, Sidney Hook said: "They don't think as rigorously as one expects Thomists to do even when they are wrong. I long for the days of Maritain and Gilson."¹⁴

There is no way to prove how much of this perceived decline in intellectual quality is due to the earlier neglect of the best Thomists in graduate schools. But the graduate teaching of Thomism affects more than the state of Thomism; it affects the intellectual life of the Church. And as long as philosophy plays a major role in priestly formation, the graduate teaching of Thomism will affect the quality of the Church's

14. Quoted in William McGurn, "Our Favorite Secular Humanist," Interview with Sidney Hook, *Crisis* 7:1 (January 1989): 38.

pastoral life as well. If Quesnell's experience is representative of seminary education prior to Vatican II, many priests were not exposed to the best that modern Thomists had accomplished. There is reason to believe that Quesnell's experience was common, at least in that respect. The aftermath of Vatican II showed, for example, that many priests did not understand Maritain's careful distinctions-without-separation between what belongs to the spiritual and temporal orders. No one was more responsible than Maritain for making the Church aware of the social dimension of her calling, as even his critics conceded. But when he reminded them that he had always subordinated social action to a personal relationship with God ("contemplation" in his terminology), the critics accused him of being unfaithful to his own insights.¹⁵ How could we have promoted better understanding of such crucial matters as the primacy of the spiritual? Only by better preparing graduate students to make them understood. The consequences of neglecting modern Thomists in graduate schools were not trivial.

The chief concern of this essay, however, is the consequences of neglecting modern Thomists for Thomism itself. Again, the historical-textual approach to Aquinas is both valid and necessary. I am merely pointing out that it is not sufficient, sufficient, that is, for training Thomists who can interest future students in Aquinas by making Thomism a living philosophy. To achieve that end, the historical-textual approach needs to be supplemented by the philosophical. The problem at the two schools mentioned above was that textual analyses were *de facto* considered sufficient for that end. I say "*de facto*" because, if asked, most of the professors who failed to require the study of modern Thomists would probably have agreed that training in textual analysis alone was not sufficient. But those professors were leaving it up to someone else to require the students to study modern thinkers who made Thomism live in their time.

IV

I have been saying that the situation we are in today is due in part to the way Thomism was taught in graduate school thirty years ago. But why was the graduate education of thirty years ago what it was? How could the textual approach, both valid and important in itself, come to so dominate Thomistic graduate education that the philosophical ap-

15. For references, see Brooke Williams Smith, *Jacques Maritain, Antimodern or Ultramodern? An Historical Analysis of His Critics, His Thought, and His Life* (New York: Elsevier, 1976), pp. 21-28.

proach was not given its due? Reflecting on the historical process through which that happened can help us understand the state of Thomism today and what we must do to improve it.

Aeterni Patris was the main source for the Thomistic revival of this century. So one might hypothesize that the predominance of the historical-textual approach over the philosophical was a result of *Aeterni Patris*'s call for a renewal of historical research into Aquinas. That is possible, but not very likely. For one thing, *Aeterni Patris*

was a purely disciplinary document . . . Its scope was limited to the method of philosophical instruction approved for the education of future priests in seminary and Catholic faculties.¹⁶

Outside of those contexts, *Aeterni Patris* imposed no religious obligation on Catholic philosophers to study or follow Aquinas, and prominent Catholic philosophers did not follow him.¹⁷ So it is doubtful that the authority of *Aeterni Patris* alone can explain the degree of interest that once existed in studying the texts of Aquinas.

More importantly, *Aeterni Patris* did more than call for a renewal of historical research into Aquinas; it also called for "ongoing dialogue between Thomists and other contemporary philosophers," and taught that "Thomism should develop its capacity to integrate human knowledge through its dialogue with contemporary science, philosophy, and culture."¹⁸ In a word, *Aeterni Patris* called for the philosophical as well as the historical approach to Thomism. In answer to this call, there emerged thinkers, like Cardinal Mercier and the early Garrigou-Lagrange, who were essentially trying to do philosophy in a Thomistic mode. Such Thomists supplied another motivation for studying Aquinas's texts, a motivation that Church authority alone did not provide. Substantial thinkers were using Thomism philosophically to deal with modern philosophical questions. The works of those thinkers told students that they should be studying Aquinas and backed up that claim, not with appeals to Church authority, but with persuasive philosophical arguments concerning modern questions, arguments purportedly based on Aquinas. Students need a reason for devoting much of their careers to Aquinas. Those thinkers, along with the authority of *Aeterni Patris*, supplied a sufficient reason.

16. Gerald A. McCool, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism: The Search for a Unitary Method* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), p. 1.

17. See Gerald A. McCool, *From Unity to Pluralism: The Internal Evolution of Thomism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), pp. 39 and 60.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 161 and 1, respectively.

Ironically, perhaps, those thinkers provided an additional, unintended motivation for studying Aquinas's texts. As McCool says:

Neo-Thomism's dialogue with contemporary philosophy, far from promoting its own internal unity, led to the emergence of systematic pluralism among Thomists themselves.¹⁹

With the passage of time, interpretations of Aquinas multiplied. The more conflicting interpretations there were, the greater was the need to determine the genuine thought of Aquinas by the historical analysis his texts. If you were already interested in Aquinas, you would have wanted to know what the correct interpretation of his thought was. If you already had an interpretation, you had to do textual analysis to justify your interpretation against conflicting ones.

By the second half of the century, however, the balance had tipped so far toward the historical approach to Thomism that its publications far out numbered those of the philosophical approach, scholars could write articles attempting to do Thomism philosophically while apparently unaware of what had already been done, and a random selection of courses at two of the leading schools could find the students not being required to read any modern Thomist. Something was lost due to the predominance of the historical-textual approach, but more than that, what was lost was something necessary for the success of that approach. Once, many fine students were interested in studying the texts of Aquinas. Now comparatively few are. Is it merely accidental that interest in studying Aquinas peaked *following* the work of so many thinkers who did not do Thomism textually but used Thomism philosophically to deal with modern philosophical questions? Is it naive to believe that, because Thomistic philosophers were showing that Aquinas had much to say about contemporary problems, and doing it by producing works of philosophy, many students who otherwise would not have been interested in studying the texts of Aquinas were interested?

On the contrary, if you are already interested in Aquinas, you have a reason for wanting to know the correct interpretation of his texts. But finding the correct interpretation does not by itself generate *new* interest. For that, Thomists have to show that Aquinas correctly understood can answer the philosophical questions contemporary students actually have. But we so emphasized the historical-textual approach that we did not produce enough of the kind of thinkers needed to sustain the interest in Aquinas. We produced textual scholars, but much less often did we produce thinkers who showed how Thomistic truths could stand on

19. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

their own two feet in the arena of philosophical problems. Because we did not have enough thinkers who could show that Aquinas was worth studying, textual studies could not continue to flourish as they once did. By overemphasizing the historical-textual approach, we were sawing off the limb we were sitting on.

Modern Thomistic philosophers were sometimes guilty of significant misinterpretations and omissions, and the historical-textual approach was a salutary balance. But today we are off balance in the other direction, and we have to find a way to restore the balance. If we do not, the numbers of students who want to invest their efforts in studying the texts of Aquinas will continue to be too small to keep Thomism alive as an important philosophical force in the culture or even in the Church.

For those still unconvinced that the philosophical approach was necessary for historical studies to flourish as they did, those who may still think that authority of *Aeterni Patris* alone was sufficient, I can only suggest that they answer two further questions for themselves. First, *Aeterni Patris* did not just call for historical analysis of Aquinas; it also called for Thomists to do Thomism philosophically. But have we responded to *Aeterni Patris*'s call by training our students for that second task, and can we adequately train them for that task without requiring them to study models of significant previous attempts at it? Second, assuming Church authority was sufficient encouragement for studying Aquinas prior to Vatican II, can we rely on Church authority to produce a similar degree of interest after Vatican II? If the answer is no, Thomists will have to *earn* that interest by making Thomism work as a living philosophy, and that will require training students who can do Thomism philosophically.²⁰

V

Of course, a reaction against the *ahistorical* manual tradition described by Quesnell also contributed to the emphasis on the historical approach. The result was that it became hard to find, at the graduate level, any remedy for the manual tradition other than historical analysis. Ironically, the vacuum created by that false dichotomy may have helped transcendental Thomism get established. The manual tradition substituted form for substance and technical vocabulary for depth of thought. The emphasis on history was an effort to return to the genuine substance of Aquinas's thought. And some may have believed that the best way to deal with a Maréchal, for example, was to let Aquinas speak for himself,

20. We can also ask how much of any current renewal of interest in Aquinas is due to the primarily philosophical work of thinkers like Grisez and MacIntyre.

by using proper historical methods. Instead, the excessive historicism that replaced ahistoricism may have made transcendental Thomism look good by appearing to be the place where Thomism was confronting modern thought philosophically and creatively. For students insufficiently exposed to other modern Thomists, transcendental Thomism could look like an attractive alternative, or, indeed, the only alternative. By not producing students who did Thomism philosophically, the historical approach left the field open to another revision of Aquinas's philosophy.

Since increasing interest in Aquinas is my topic, transcendental Thomism's failure to do so deserves comment. I submit that transcendental Thomism is insufficiently *relevant* to solving the modern problems concerning which it claims superiority to other forms of Thomism. For example, some transcendental Thomists see an opposition between Aristotelian science and the methods of empirical knowledge, especially history.²¹ But the main contemporary problems about empirical knowledge concern the possibility of intersubjective and intercultural truth and, if such truth is possible, of verifying which empirical hypotheses are true. And the work of Maritain and Simon, based on Aristotelian science, is much more pertinent to these problems than is transcendental Thomism.

For example, hermeneutics raises the problem of how we can know the true interpretation of a text, and deconstruction questions the very idea of a text's having a true interpretation. Concerning the possibility of truth, Maritain may be alone among Thomists in requiring that the nature of truth be the first problem epistemology addresses, and his use of the distinction between things as things and things as objects is needed to solve that problem. For example, that distinction shows, against Quine, that how to translate a text is a genuine empirical question, in all respects. Since it is an empirical question, verifying the correct answer requires the kind of non-Kantian regulative principles Maritain spoke about, for example, that change must be caused and that similar causes have similar effects. Translation and interpretation are causal analyses. The effect to be explained is the existence of physical marks and sounds. The causal explanation is that these entities are used as signs by an agent who possesses certain thoughts and intends to communicate those thoughts by means of the marks and sounds. The verification of such causal hypotheses is founded, ultimately, on the same metaphysical causal principles that any empirical verification is founded on. The defense of those principles and the explanation of their application to experience requires Aristotelian philosophy, together

21. See McCool, *Nineteenth-Century Scholasticism*, pp. 260-62.

with the distinction of things from objects, Maritain's distinction of ontological from empiriological analysis, and Simon's analysis of order in analogical sets. And the same Aristotelian analyses that justify empirical knowledge answer the objections of Hume and Kant against metaphysics.²² Transcendental Thomism's subjective starting point is tangential to solving these problems about empirical and metaphysical knowledge. Kant sought to solve them from a subjective starting point only because he could not see any other way to solve them.

To their undying credit, transcendental Thomists were and are trying to do Thomism philosophically. To respond to that attempt, we must do more than show that they were not faithful to Aquinas. We must also imitate them in producing literature that is philosophical and contemporary.

VI

To restore the necessary balance to Thomistic graduate education, wherever that still goes on, we must require students to read and be examined on a number of authors who do Thomism, *even if not under that name*,²³ philosophically. The authors chosen do not have to be from previous generations. Some people, including graduates of non-Catholic universities, have continued to do Thomism philosophically, even though there are too few of them. For example, I know of four Thomists who have written studies of Quine from a Thomistic perspective. So, if you have tried an author who did not work with your students, there are other authors whom you can try. The important thing is that, in the course of their studies, graduate students be required to become familiar with a variety of such authors, three or four at a minimum, since not every author will appeal to every student.

By an author's appeal to a student, I do not mean the student's agreement with the author's interpretation of Aquinas. I mean the

22. For the argument of this paragraph, see Cahalan, *Causal Realism*, especially pp. 245-66. *Causal Realism* does not explicitly address hermeneutics and deconstruction. But its reply to Quine on translation and defense of empirical verification, based on Maritain and Simon, can be extended to the problem of intersubjective and intercultural interpretation, since translation and interpretation are causal analyses.

23. I would rather call Aquinas's philosophy "Realism" than "Thomism." With Mortimer Adler, I think that using an individual's name to identify that philosophy does it a disservice by failing to express its universality as the only philosophy whose principles make it open, at least in potency, to the full range of reality and experience. See Mortimer J. Adler, *St. Thomas and the Gentiles* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1938), pp. 63-65 and n. 65. I am calling it Thomism here, since interest in Aquinas himself is my topic.

appeal of the author's method of doing and writing philosophy. In fact, I assume that professors will often require students to read authors whose interpretations of Aquinas the professors disagree with on important points. This has to be assumed, because few Thomists would agree on all important points, despite their best efforts at historical analysis. In reality, historical analysis has not solved the problem of conflicting interpretations, unless we decide to use the opinion of the majority of scholars at any moment as the criterion of truth.

Of course, there are limits on the kind of authors one would consider models for doing Thomism philosophically. For the reasons mentioned above, as well as other reasons, my own bias is against the transcendental Thomists. But something is wrong if a faculty cannot find a number of authors who would do students much more good than harm, despite the authors' imperfect interpretations. If you cannot find a number of such authors and your interpretation of Aquinas is correct, something is wrong with Aquinas's philosophy, because Aquinas has not been able to inspire thinkers who both follow him and do original philosophy.

Obviously, you are free to criticize in class the modern Thomists you disagree with, as long as you criticize them with arguments that are philosophical, not merely textual. But you should be very careful in your selection of topics to dispute. One reason so many of my fellow graduate students lost interest in Aquinas was that the Thomistic professors spent so much time disputing the interpretations of other Thomists on points that appeared important to the professors, but appeared much less important to the students—and for good reason. In other classes, the students were encountering contemporary issues that challenged philosophy of the Thomistic type in incomparably more fundamental ways than interpretations of Aquinas challenged each other.²⁴ Thomistic professors were not discussing those more fundamental issues, or if they were, they often seemed more intent on establishing one reading of Aquinas's position against other readings than on responding to contemporary challenges. The students were intelligent enough to see that the intra-Thomistic debates were not answering their more pressing questions. They knew that there was a big philosophical world out there to confront, and they perceived Thomistic professors as ignoring that

24. Often, differences between Thomists existed, if not in the eye of the beholder, at least in the magnifying glass of the beholder. The De Koninck/Eschmann/Maritain debate about the common good became one of the most bitter intra-Thomistic disputes. Joseph W. Evans told me that, long after the dispute, De Koninck remarked to him that the disagreement between De Koninck and Maritain amounted only to De Koninck's wanting Maritain to state that the beatific vision was a common good.

world for the sake of confronting one another. Those students were experiencing a Thomism turned in on itself. We cannot afford to repeat that mistake.

In closing, I am not suggesting that we restore Thomism to balance by overreacting in the other direction. An historical understanding of Aquinas is necessary, without doubt, and we must continue to train students to do historical analyses. But to interest future students in the texts of Aquinas, we must also produce graduates who can write Thomism philosophically. Although I consider the proposal of this paper to be moderate and modest, our attitude toward the proposal should not be moderate. The future of Thomism is at stake.