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Mind, Metaphysics, and Value in the Thomistic and Analytical Traditions

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1 Introduction

Analytical philosophy has in general been ahistorical. However, in some analytical quarters there is a common assumption that much analytical work is continuous with medieval or scholastic thought. But this affinity is hardly ever spelled out, if not ignored. On the other hand, some historians of philosophy would seem to regard the contemporary evaluation of earlier thought as utterly misguided. The contributors to this volume aim to sail between the Scylla of historicism and the Charybdis of anachronism. The purpose of the book is to foster a historically informed interaction between analytical and Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy. To accomplish this, the writers use the tools of analytical philosophy in assessing the historical arguments and express them in accessible terms. For reasons of space, only an overview can be accomplished here.

2 Philosophy of Mind

One of the reasons analytical philosophers neglect medieval philosophy, is the suspicion that it is theology in disguise. In his paper, David Braine accurately locates the properly philosophical material to Aquinas' *quaestiones disputatae* and commentaries on Aristotle. Braine exemplifies with Aquinas' doctrine of the active and the potential intellect, a precondition of human thinking and communication. The intellect is active in that the capacity to discriminate the relevant features of likeness depends on some prior activity of the intellect. The intellect is potential in that it has an ability to store *species* for later uses. No doubt is Braine right in that Aquinas' account of the nature of mind, is more realist than much that goes under that name in Anglophone philosophy. But it remains to be explained why the active intellect reliably causes general terms, and why there is commonly believed to be a difference between memory and other modalities of cognition when (purportedly) in fact the potential intellect applies stored *species*. It is moreover hard to see how Aquinas's theory can do justice to non-standard (non-veridical) experiences of things.

Richard Cross argues in his paper that Aquinas' ontology is able to deal with standard objections against substance-dualism, physicalism and property-dualism, and thus makes a significant contribution to the mind-body problem. A

human being is (like any other thing composed of metaphysical parts) a complex of prime matter and substantial form. The human soul is that by which the human body is a particular substance. An essential property of the human soul is *being the substantial form of a human body* and, as the substantial form of the human body, the soul is part of that body. Thus the body can act causally on the soul by its being one of the latter's own properties. Likewise, as the human soul is that in virtue of which a human body has its essential properties, the causal influence of the soul on the body is the body's being affected by one of its own properties. The apparently immaterial nature of thought is neither a problem on this account, since a human being is not merely a physical substance. Cross moreover improves on Aquinas' account of the origin of the soul, but Aquinas' notion of the soul as 'separated substance' is seriously lacking. Not only is it important for Aquinas' account of human being that the soul lacks metaphysical parts, but it would seem to affect Cross' understanding of the possibility of individual survival after death in Aquinas.

John Haldane argues that a dominant combination of non-reductive physicalism with perceptual externalism in analytical philosophy, is incoherent. According to physicalism perceptual content supervenes on an ontically prior and determining neural state, so that any intentional relation will either reduce to a causal relation or supervene on one. Externalism about perceptual content holds, on the other hand, that the relation between a (veridical) perceptual state and its object (viewed as a state of affairs) is metaphysically necessary. Causal or physical necessity is, though, generally taken to be weaker than metaphysical necessity, so that the subject could be in a given perceptual state although the world was quite different. However, according to perceptual externalism physical states are metaphysically sufficient for perceptual states, so that a subject could not be in a given (veridical) perceptual state without the environment being in a fitting state.

C.F.J. Martin explicates the ineliminable difference between voluntary and non-voluntary causality in interaction with two suggestions of Anthony Kenny. First, the difference is not, according to Martin, the defeasibility of practical reasoning. For defeasibility is also a mark of reasoning about non-voluntary causation, as reasoning about causal connections presuppose other causal tendencies being equal. Building on Geach, Martin argues instead that both practical reasoning and causal reasoning display defeasibility because their premises involve unavoidable reference to an end. Second, the difference does not consist in non-voluntary causal tendencies being unfulfilled by interfering tendencies, and rational causal tendencies being possibly fulfilled when interfered. The fulfilment of any tendency is rather relative to a certain description of that tendency, and so both causal and practical reasoning involve relativity to a description. This brings us closer to what the difference really is. Martin argues that non-voluntary tendencies are always fulfilled (except in the (purported) case of miracles), but often non-paradigmatically. Voluntary tendencies, on the other hand, are fulfilled paradigmatically, if fulfilled at all.

Agency is also discussed by Stefaan Cuypers. Against the current of event-causation, he argues that agent-causation is irreducible and the only way to account for active human participation in the occurrence of events. On the event-

causal analysis of agency, however, the agent is simply uninvolved not only during the prior causal history (which supposedly leads to his/her action), but also during the occurrence of the action itself. The essential features of freedom and responsibility in human action cannot therefore be taken into account on this ontology. Cuyper finds the elements for a credible and viable agent-causal theory in Aquinas, where an instance of agent-causation is a contingent exertion of a person's will-power in a teleological context. A voluntary action is a purposive choice or decision towards the (real or conceived) good. As object a volition is determined by knowledge, though as operation it is self-determining and efficiently causes psychic power and bodily movements. This dependence constitutes the freedom of choice as the faculty of reason is open to alternative possibilities.

According to Martin Stone, Aquinas' philosophy of mind also contains the key to his theory of natural law. Stone argues that the many contemporary attempts to determine the extent of ethical naturalism in Aquinas' account of natural law are misguided. To make sense of his natural law-theory our attention should instead, says Stone, be directed to Aquinas' view of the roles of reason and will in human action. For in his account of human action, Aquinas draws a basic distinction between moral and natural ends because of the irreducible kinds of agent and event causalities. But it is not strictly voluntary agency that makes some acts moral; only rational agents can direct their acts to an end as a known end, and therefore practical reason – not nature – is the immediate rule and criterion of morality in Aquinas. Practical reason is, however, not a law unto itself, but apprehends the ends to which human actions should be directed and formulates natural law consequent to this apprehension. Stone does not deny that there are passages that may lend support to a naturalist reading of Aquinas' ethics, but maintains that these do not agree with the latter's overall argumentation. More explicitly, these are passages in which morality is hastily reduced to biological finality, instead of practical reason grasping the finality of human nature as such.

Much analytical philosophy is sceptical about there being features of reality that can be represented in cognition and that grounds accurate use of general concepts. The purported solution, however, that objects depend on conceptualisation, just transfers the allegedly realist problem of the inscrutability of reference to the inscrutability of conceptualisation: why do we have concepts after all? Jonathan Jacobs believes that the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition provides explanatory resources for a foundation of realist veracity by its integrated account of object and concept. Objects can on this latter view be conceptualised on account of their prior intelligibility, and the intelligible features of reality are cognitively actualised in general concepts. But the informing of the mind in the same way as its object, does not mean that the comprehension of every individual in fact actualises all intelligible features of every object. Mind is just a potential for a relation of reference to a mind-independent order, and this cognitive capacity is only actualised in proportion to its comprehension of reality. At any rate, it is not linguistic practices that make some concepts right, but the intelligible features of reality. Although the paper is somewhat repetitive, Jacobs does show the robust realism of the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition.

3 Metaphysics

David Oderberg carefully examines the principle of individuation of material substances in Thomism. Having set out the principle of individuation negatively and positively, Oderberg argues that it is matter possessing indeterminate ranges of modal and temporal variability of dimensions. Time is one of the dimensionive properties by which matter individuates, and thus the principle of individuation may be said to be the relativisation of matter to time of existence. Time does not, though, affect the way form unifies, but the way form unifies affects the temporal characteristics of a substance.

Christopher Hughes evaluates in particular one of Aquinas' refutations of the alleged incompatibility of God's knowledge with the contingency of its object. According to Hughes, a straight denial is the only viable answer to the purportedly absolute necessity of the conditional *If God knew that this will be, it will be*. But Aquinas concedes, on the one hand, that if God knew that something will be, its being so (considered in a certain way) is necessary; and denies, on the other hand, that if God knew that something will be, its being so (considered in itself) is absolutely necessary. Aquinas merely grants a conditional necessity of (parts of) the eternal now, the present and the past, and this does not, of course, fit well with Hughes' view that 'everything happening now is unconditionally necessary' (156). Hughes does not take into account Aquinas' basic distinction within divine knowledge between *scientia simplicis intelligentiae* and *scientia visionis*. The objects of the latter kind of knowledge rests on the freedom of the divine will, and to my mind, that is the reason for Aquinas' account of radical contingency.

Gerard Hughes contributes a fine piece on the inadequacy of the strictly logical approach to alethic modality in analytical philosophy. Often analytical philosophers suppose that properly ontological issues can be solved by the application of (a, supposedly, ontologically neutral) predicate logic. Alethic modality is moreover assimilated to which worlds are logically possible, and from the various systems of modal logic, ontological conclusions are drawn. But according to Hughes one cannot readily adapt the logical notation to cope with the ontological thesis that a property-less individual is necessarily an individual of a kind. In order to treat modality satisfactory, he presents instead a broadly Aristotelian ontology. Hughes does not argue for why one would hold to a thesis that substances are necessarily individuals of a kind, but clearly that is the only way to avoid a violation of the law of non-contradiction and the identity of indiscernibles. Moreover, a logically possible world may not be causally realisable, as logical possibility is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for causal possibility. Hughes therefore suggests that, to exist is to possess causal powers, is ontologically primitive, and thus makes a sharp distinction between logical and causal possibility. Our judgement whether a world is causally possible or not will, of course, depend on our limited knowledge of the causal structure of the real or actual world, and this account leads to a more agnostic and more realist assessment of possibilities.

Gyula Klima deepens Gerard Hughes perspective. Klima contrasts Kripke's essentialism that some common terms are rigid designators with Aquinas' essentialism that things have essences. He argues that the problem with the analytical

account is not only that the essences of things is made into a matter of personal intuitions as to linguistic usage, but that it generally renders any necessary property essential to anything. As a more adequate conceptual framework, Klima carefully presents a reconstructed formal semantics of medieval essentialism. Herein the signification of common features in individual things is connected with actual beings, by providing the truth conditions of a statement in terms of what the predicate actually signifies in the reference of the subject. This means that the predicate 'exists' will necessarily be true of anything to the extent that it exists or is actual. Still, the significate of the predicate 'exists' in a thing, need not be identical with the significate of any of the thing's substantial predicates. This semantical theory does not itself determine that there are any essential predicates, but provides ontological grounds for there being some such predicates. That there are natures of things is then a matter of scientific experiments, and thus natural science may once again be united to metaphysics.

4 Conclusion

It is hard to do justice to the contributions in this volume. But the authors are unanimous in their sympathy for a historically knowledgeable analytical philosophy, in particular informed by Aristotelian-Thomistic insights, and advance dialogue between these philosophical schools. It is a pity, though, that the volume begins with a paper which claims that Aquinas is a proto-Wittgensteinian and an anti-Cartesian. Fergus Kerr is concerned to show that Aquinas argues just like Wittgenstein that the private world depends on the public world. But Kerr does not give any reason how or why some modern Austrian aphorisms could or should be attributed to some medieval Italian arguments, nor does he provide any argument for why past (or for that matter, present and future) philosophers are to be judged after some sayings of Wittgenstein. At any rate, the overall gain of this book appears to be its challenge to the standard approach to metaphysics in analytic philosophy, i.e. the assumption that properties are to their objects as predicates are to their subjects. On its own an object is often taken to have no properties whatsoever, but only to exemplify such (whether necessary or contingent). The problem is of course then, that these objects are in themselves indiscernible from each other and therefore identical; but if identical, then this object simultaneously exemplifies contradictory properties. This Platonic/Quinean approach cannot moreover account for changes that result in either the formation of a wholly new thing or in the annihilation of a thing. Aquinas – together with Aristotle, scholastics, realist phenomenologists and others – argues instead that some things are metaphysically wholes of dependent parts. An ontology where things have an internal structure solves not only the above problem of the identity of things, but does justice to genuine change. Thus this volume is a welcome contribution to the renewed interest in Aristotelian philosophy and a corrective to reductionist and ahistorical tendencies in contemporary philosophy.