

Wippel, John F. Mediaeval Reactions to the Encounter Between Faith and Reason. The Aquinas Lecture, 1995. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995. viii + 113. Cloth, \$10.10 -- The story Wippel tells in this brief but valuable volume is a familiar one, of how the early medieval consensus on the relationship between faith and reason ("Faith Seeks, Understanding Finds") collapsed in the thirteenth century under siege from Radical Aristotelians at the University of Paris. Wippel gives his account in clear terms especially well suited to beginning students. Although there are few novelties in this volume, everything is based on the most up-to-date research, and a third of the volume consists of detailed notes that will be the most valuable resource here for scholars already familiar with the basic story.

'Radical Aristotelianism' is Wippel's term for the movement that is more often known as Latin Averroism. This latter title, Wippel believes (14), is too narrow to cover the various members of the Paris Arts Faculty in 1260s and 1270s who were stirring up controversy between philosophers and theologians, Church bureaucrats and University faculty. The two Radical Aristotelians on whom Wippel focuses are Siger of Brabant and Boethius of Dacia. Although Wippel devotes some attention to describing their controversial views on subjects like the eternity of the world and the unicity of the human intellect, his primary interest is in describing their positions on the relationship between faith and reason. The key text from Siger on this topic is his claim

that

just as those things which are of faith cannot be demonstrated by human reason, so too there are some human arguments for positions opposed to such things which cannot be resolved by human reason (37).

The claim, in other words, is that there are philosophical arguments that we cannot refute (dissolvi non possunt), but which contradict the tenets of faith. Given this view, it is no wonder that Siger's own writings seem to be in constant flux between asserting those tenets of faith, and rehearsing arguments that seem to show their contrary.

Boethius's position, as described by Wippel, follows similar lines. Like Siger, Boethius appears to believe that correct philosophical reasoning, based on valid premises, can lead to conclusions that are (revealed to be) false (69). As a result, in Wippel's words, Boethius "strongly warns against attempting to justify faith" through philosophical arguments (68). In this way Boethius attempts to protect both faith and philosophy by separating the two. This is not the much-maligned pseudo-doctrine of the double truth, but one can see how earlier historians might have mistaken it for such.

It is Thomas Aquinas, naturally, who appears as the champion of the harmony between faith and reason, theology and philosophy. Using to good effect Aquinas's vivid discussion in his De trinitate Commentary, Wippel shows how Aquinas protects both

faith and philosophy not by separating the two, but by linking them. Wippel paraphrases: "it is impossible for those things which pertain to philosophy to be contrary to those which belong to faith, even though they fall short of them" (29). Anything contrary to faith "is not philosophy but rather an abuse of philosophy" (30).

One of the most interesting implications of Wippel's discussion is that it shows how in this debate Aquinas is the real defender of philosophy. Although it might superficially seem that Aquinas is confining philosophy within the narrow bounds of faith, his is in fact the only position that can secure for philosophy some independent relevance. On one side of Aquinas were the notorious condemnations, which Wippel discusses in some detail, and which plainly amount to putting philosophy in chains. On the other side were the Radical Aristotelians. But ironically, as Wippel clearly shows, Siger's and Boethius's remarks, ostensibly made in defense of their philosophical pursuits, in fact draw into question the meaningfulness of their entire enterprise. If sound philosophical arguments can lead us to conclusions we are convinced must be false, then what point is there in philosophy at all?

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