

John Inglis On Aquinas. Wadsworth Philosophers Series. Belmont, Cal.: Wadsworth 2002. Pp. i + 96pp. (Paper: ISBN: 0-534-58360-1)

There can be no doubt that a brief but illuminating introduction to the work of Thomas Aquinas would be a very good thing. There are many of us who *would* like to teach Aquinas, in a variety of different courses, but who nevertheless *do not* like to teach Aquinas, because it is so difficult to get students into the texts and concepts. John Inglis's attempt to fill this need is by no means a bad book, but I am sorry to say it is not a book I would give to my students.

There are various ways in which a brief introduction to Aquinas might be useful. First, it might explain Aquinas's conceptual framework in a clear and accessible way. Second, it might give a succinct overview of Aquinas's philosophical doctrines, showing along the way how much interesting philosophy there is here. Third, it might carefully analyze selected arguments from Aquinas, seeking to show by example how he ought to be studied. Fourth, it might seek to connect Aquinas to larger questions in philosophy, both contemporary and historical. Fifth, it might supply the historical background to Aquinas's thought.

Inglis spends virtually no time on the first of these – there is, for instance, no explanation of form and matter, or actuality and potentiality. He also devotes virtually no time to the third, analyzing specific arguments. In such a short book, one can sympathize with that strategy to some extent, but Inglis goes rather too far toward downplaying the importance of argumentation in Aquinas. He remarks without explanation that the five ways “are not proofs in the modern sense, but ways in which reason can be used to speak about what is held on faith” (39), and that what we find in the subsequent articles on

God's nature "are not proofs in the modern sense" (40). I cannot even imagine what the basis for these claims might be.

Inglis does attempt the second task, to give the reader an overview of Aquinas's philosophy, following the structure of the *Summa theologiae*. In this regard the book is reasonably successful, though I would not say that he makes Aquinas's ideas seem very interesting. This is partly because he makes no attempt at the fourth task, to connect Aquinas's thought with broader currents in philosophy. What Inglis is most interested in, by far, is the fifth task, supplying historical context. In this regard the book is not just interesting but positively controversial. Following the lead of Leonard Boyle and others, Inglis argues that Aquinas – and particularly the *Summa theologiae* – should be read as aimed at educating young Dominican friars. Inglis extends this idea to the point that he downplays the various remote influences on Aquinas, such as Aristotle, in favor of stressing contemporary Dominican influences. "Rather than a principled Aristotelian or Neoplatonist, Aquinas was a vowed Dominican who made use of, and was conditioned by, scholarly traditions in order to solve intellectual problems at hand" (26).

To make good on this claim, Inglis discusses in surprising detail various figures usually considered rather marginal to Aquinas's story, such as the Dominicans William Peraldus and Moneta of Cremona. Still more strikingly, each chapter situates Aquinas's thought in opposition to the Cathar heresy, and proposes that many of Aquinas's central ideas were framed as a response to this thirteenth-century renewal of Manicheism. Maddeningly, though we are told a great deal about the Dominican "campaign against the Cathars" and how "Aquinas participated in this project in his capacity as a theologian" (61), Inglis neglects to mention that such a claim would tie Aquinas to one of the more

bloody and shameful episodes of the thirteenth century, in the course of which Dominican inquisitors ruthlessly tortured and killed in large numbers throughout southern Europe.

Inglis's thesis about Aquinas and the Cathars is one that it would be good to hear more about, with scholarly details supplied. In a book of this kind, however, he does not have the space to make an adequate case, and on its face his position seems implausible. Though Aquinas does sometimes mention the errors of the Manicheans – e.g., at *Summa contra gentiles* III.7 – the references are always in passing, with no suggestion that he is combating a living and genuinely threatening doctrine. In contrast, where Aquinas did see a threat, he replied vigorously and in detail, as in his defenses of the mendicant orders, and in his anti-Averroist treatise *De unitate intellectus*.

Surprisingly, Inglis says virtually nothing about Aquinas's campaign against Averroism and radical Aristotelianism. And though he does mention the controversy over the unity of the intellect, he gets it wrong, remarking, "Averroes is the one who has [sic] raised this issue by arguing that one active intellect is shared by each and ever [sic] human being" (63). (Wadsworth might reinvest at least some of its profits in decent copy editing.) This leads Inglis to remark at the "respect" (64) Aquinas shows that doctrine in *Summa theol.* I.79.4-5. Aquinas respects the doctrine of the active intellect's unity, however, because it was a venerable view going back well before Averroes, and especially because it was defended by many prominent contemporary Christian theologians. The doctrine that Averroes had raised, and that Aquinas treated with no respect whatsoever, was that all human beings share a single possible intellect.

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