

• Book Reviews/Recensions/Buchbesprechungen

EuroJTh (1998) 7:2, 127–128

0960–2720

Thomas Aquinas: God and Explanations

C. F. J. Martin

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997, 212pp., £40, H/B, ISBN 0-7486-0901-6

RÉSUMÉ

Martin a publié un texte très érudit, mais écrit de façon amusante, qui démontre que les cinq voies peuvent être lues avec grand profit dans le contexte du projet de Thomas d'Aquin qui voulait bâtir une science de la théologie. Il montre aussi qu'une étude de l'œuvre de Thomas d'Aquin présente un intérêt philosophique pour aujourd'hui. Le livre présente la nature de la science aristotélicienne et défend de telles notions de la science. Il explique pourquoi il est nécessaire de montrer que Dieu existe avant qu'on puisse savoir ce qu'est Dieu. La question: «X existe-t-il?» étant posée, nous sommes conduits à un chapitre sur la question: «Que voulons-nous dire par x?», puis à un autre sur la question: «Que voulons-nous dire par 'existe'?» L'auteur défend la validité de la preuve d'une cause à partir d'un effet et étudie chacune des cinq voies (de même que ce que dit Thomas d'Aquin sur les faits qui militent contre l'existence de Dieu). Une bonne lecture!

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Es handelt sich um ein wissenschaftlich gegründetes, gleichzeitig unterhaltsam geschriebenes Buch. Die fünf Wege seien am ergiebigsten auf dem Hintergrund des Versuchs von Thomas von Aquin zu lesen, eine Wissenschaft der Theologie zu formulieren. Ihn studiere man am besten, wenn man ihn zu modernen Fragestellungen befragt und einen echten Beitrag erwartet. Die wesentlichen Züge aristotelischer Wissenschaft werden beschrieben und als gültig verteidigt. Es gelte, die Existenz Gottes zu zeigen, bevor man zu verstehen versucht, 'was' Gott ist. Die Frage 'Existiert X?' führt zur Behandlung der Fragen 'Was meinen wir mit X?' und 'Was meinen wir mit, existieren?'. Die Möglichkeit einer Beweisführung von den Auswirkungen her wird verteidigt, jeder der fünf Wege wird untersucht, wie auch Aquinas Argumente gegen eine Existenz Gottes. Eine empfehlenswerte Lektüre.

The chief aim and contribution of this text is to show how light can be shed on the five ways by reading them in the light of Thomas' whole project of constructing a (Aristotelian) science of theology. Martin has written a very scholarly and gripping book that betrays a deep grasp of Aquinas and a passionate belief that the study of ancient and medieval philosophy can contribute to modern philosophical investigations. It would be fair to say that this belief leads to a fairly evident chip on the shoulder regarding a philosophical establishment that largely relegates medieval philosophy to history of philosophy courses. This chip does, however, generate some very amusing comments. The style is very amusing in places (unless one is an empiricist and thus the object of the ridicule).

Martin begins by launching a MacIntyrian style critique of those who reject tradition and authority as a source in philosophy before proceeding to outline the nature of 'science' in medieval philosophy. He argues, as others now do, that a science was conceived of as a *complete* body of knowledge and *not* the method of 'finding out'. Much ridiculing of Aristotelian science was based upon the misunderstanding that it was a bad attempt at modern science. Now Thomas believed that one could not have a definition of a thing that did not exist as there is no nature there to define. So we must answer the question, 'does God exist?' *before* we can ask, 'what does the word "God" mean?'. This is why Thomas' project of constructing a science of theology begins with proofs of God's existence. Of course, one cannot know what 'God' means when we ask, 'Does God exist?' but we can know what the word *signifies*—that which providentially cares for and causes the world. But what do we mean by 'exist' when we ask if God exist? Chapter 5 provides a very thorough discussion. Chapter 6 defends the critical notion of the method of demonstrating the existence of a cause from its effect (which is what the five ways are a particular example of). The first half of the book is not light reading. It is a very detailed exploration and defence of Aquinas' project and methods so that we can see how the five ways fit into the grand scheme. Chapter 5 in particular would have benefited from some diagrams to help us see how all the divisions, sub-divisions, sub-sub-divisions etc. relate to each other. The effort of a close reading does pay off however.

Chapters 8–13 were much more familiar territory. First Aquinas' examination of the best evidence against God is discussed: evil and 'the argument from science'. The latter (the claim that if we can explain each individual part of the universe then we have an explanation for the whole and do not need to posit God) is especially well dealt with. Each of the five ways is given a chapter of its own as the climax of the book. There was an exposition of the first way that avoids the obviously false premise that only something which is itself F can make a potentially-F thing into and actually-F thing. The third and fifth ways are very interestingly discussed whilst Martin makes as much as he can of the peculiar fourth way.

In conclusion, I think that Martin makes a good case that modern philosophers make a serious mistake if they write off the medievals as nothing more than an historical peculiarity. A good read.

Robin Parry
Worcester, England

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God, Reason and Theistic Proofs

S. T. Davis

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University
Press, 1997, ISBN 0-7486-0799-4

RÉSUMÉ

Ce livre vise à présenter au lecteur les preuves de l'existence de Dieu. Il défend toute une série d'arguments (y compris l'argument ontologique sous une forme anselmiène). Il critique la position néo-Wittgensteinienne de D. Z. Phillips et montre quelle a été l'influence de l'épistémologie réformée et de la critique du fondationalisme sur les preuves théistes. L'auteur apprécie le volontarisme de l'approche de la foi en Dieu chez Pascal et James. Il croit fermement à la valeur de la théologie naturelle, tout en étant aussi très conscient de ses limites. Il nous donne une bonne introduction au sujet, mais sans apporter beaucoup de neuf.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Das Buch von Davis ist als Einführung in die Beweisführung für die Existenz Gottes gedacht. Es beschreibt eine Reihe der traditionellen Gottesbeweise sehr positiv, auch den ontologischen in der mittelalterlichen Form

von Anselm von Canterbury. Kritisch wird die linguistische Argumentation von D. Z. Phillips bewertet. Die Bedeutung reformierter Erkenntnislehre wie die Kritik von Gottesbeweisen werden diskutiert. Pascal und Jakobus sind als Beispiele eines voluntaristischen Glaubenszugangs positiv gewürdigt. Von der großen Bedeutung natürlicher Theologie ist der Autor überzeugt, er weiß jedoch auch um ihre Begrenztheit. Das Buch läßt sich als brauchbare Einführung in das Thema bezeichnen ohne den Anspruch eines wesentlichen Forschungsfortschrittes.

Davis has provided what should be a very helpful text for undergraduate courses on the Philosophy of Religion as well as providing some help to postgraduates. The opening chapter is a good orientation in the whole field of argumentation, fallacies and theistic proofs. Chapter two is a defense of the ontological argument of St Anselm. It is rather nice to read an introduction to theistic proofs that thinks that this argument actually works. This chapter is possibly the most demanding on the reader but it is worth the effort even if one remains unpersuaded. Davis then, in chapter 3 uses insights from Anselm to critique the neo-Wittgensteinianism of D.Z. Phillips. There are some telling points made against non-realism (though Phillips himself would not want to position himself as a non realist) which justify the effort of offering theistic proofs. In chapter 4 Aquinas' cosmological arguments are explained and defended whilst chapter 5 offers a discussion of foundationalism and Reformed Epistemology. Davies feels that the insights of the latter position do not remove the value of offering theistic proofs. I was uncertain as to why this chapter was located in the middle of the book rather than before the discussion of the actual theistic proofs began but it made the point well enough that criticism of classical foundationalism need not remove the need for arguments for God's existence. The design argument in its pre-and post-Darwin (fine tuning of the universe) forms is investigated and defended although Davis rightly pays David Hume his due: this argument cannot carry enough weight to lead us to the God of theism.

Religious experience (ch. 7) does provide reason for thinking that naturalism is false but cannot be used as proof that the God of theism exists. It was a shame that Davis did not interact with Keith Yandell's book *The Epistemology of Religious Experience* in this chapter as Yandell thinks that such experi-