

Daniel Contreras

Universidad de los Andes, Chile

danielcontrerasrios@gmail.com

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-6197-579X>

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Thomas Aquinas: Yesterday and Today

Tomás de Aquino: ayer y hoy

Tomás de Aquino: ontem e hoje

This edition of the *Humanidades* journal is dedicated to Thomas Aquinas, on the occasion of the 750th anniversary of his death. Despite the rather negative associations that often unfairly are tied to the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas has almost always been recognized, from many different fronts, as one of the most important intellectual figures, not only of the Middle Ages, but of the entire history of Western philosophical and theological thought.

Born in Roccasecca in 1225, Thomas Aquinas entered the recently founded Order of Preachers at a very young age. He received his intellectual formation in different educational centers in Europe, under the tutelage - at least for a time - of Albertus Magnus, and in 1256 he was appointed master regent of

the Faculty of Theology at the University of Paris¹. After this first regency in Paris, St. Thomas was sent to Italy, where in different places he exercised his ministry and wrote an important part of his best-known works. Finally, he returned to Paris for a second regency in the Faculty of Theology, and this was probably the most intellectually intense period of his life, in which he produced philosophical and theological works of a very high level, including a large part of his commentaries on Aristotle and the *Summa theologiae*. He died in 1274, on the way to the Second Council of Lyon, and his remains rested, at first, in the Cistercian abbey of Fossanova, although very soon his body was claimed and disputed by different interested groups².

As anyone who has had access to it can confirm, the work of Thomas Aquinas is enormous. The Leonine Commission, founded in 1879 with the impulse of Pope Leo XIII to produce critical editions of the complete works of St. Thomas, is still active more than a century after its creation, and it is certainly unlikely its work will stop relatively soon³.

After repeated magisterial interventions over many centuries, Thomas Aquinas has become a sort of bastion of Catholic orthodoxy⁴. While this is undeniable today, this was not always the case in the past. Following the

1 Biographical data on Thomas Aquinas are duly collected and presented in Jean-Pierre Torrell's classic biography, *Initiation à saint Thomas d'Aquin. Sa personne et son œuvre*, Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 2015; there is a useful summary chronology on pages 421-424. For the various stages of the intellectual training program at the University of Paris, in the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Theology, see Palémon Glorieux, "L'enseignement au Moyen Âge. Techniques et méthodes en usage à la Faculté de Théologie de Paris au XIII^e siècle," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, vol. 35, 1968, pp. 65-186; Bernardo Bazán, 'Les questions disputées, principalement dans les facultés de théologie,' in Bernardo Bazán & John Wippel, & Gérard Fransen & Danielle Jacquart (eds.), *Les questions disputées et les questions quodlibétiques dans les facultés de théologie, de droit et de médecine*, Turnhout, Brepols, 1985 [vol. 44-45 of *Typologie des Sources du Moyen-Âge Occidentale*], pp. 13-149; and Olga Weijers, *A Scholar's Paradise. Teaching and Debating in Medieval Paris*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2015 [vol. 2 of *Studies on the Faculty of Arts. History and Influence*]. For a cautious and up-to-date presentation on the extent of the intellectual relationship between Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, see Paul Hellmeier, *Anima et intellectus. Albertus Magnus und Thomas von Aquin über Seele und Intellekt des Menschen*, Münster, Aschendorff Verlag, 2011 [vol. 75 of *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters*], pp. 11-43.

2 Shortly after his death, the members of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Paris addressed a letter, dated 02 May 1274, to the general chapter of the Dominicans gathered in Lyon, asking them to please send them his bones to be buried in Paris, the most suitable place to remember "the memory of such a great cleric, such a great father, such a great doctor" [*ad tanti clerici, tanti patris, tanti doctoris memoriam*]. See M.-H. Laurent (ed.), *Fontes vitae s. Thomae Aquinatis*, Saint Maximin, Revue Thomiste, 1937 [part of *Documents inédits publiés par la "Revue Thomiste"*] Fasciculus VI, pp. 583-586; here p. 585. For a detailed history of the events related to the body of St. Thomas after his death, see Marika Räsänen, *Thomas Aquinas's Relics as Focus for Conflict and Cult in the Late Middle Ages*. The Restless Corpse, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2017.

3 For a panoramic view Leonine Commission and its past and futurework, see Concetta Luna, "L'édition léonine de saint Thomas d'Aquin: vers une méthode de critique et d'écotique," *Revue des Sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, vol. 89, 2005, pp. 31-110.

4 The various testimonies and magisterial documents are collected and commented on in Santiago Ramirez, *De auctoritate doctrinali s. Thomae Aquinatis*, Salamanca, Apartado 17, 1952.

example of his master Albertus Magnus, very early in his academic career St. Thomas devoted himself to the in-depth and thorough study of the recently translated works of Aristotle, together with those of his Arabic commentators, in order to assimilate the best of Greek philosophy and incorporate it critically into the Christian tradition -which by that time had already reached a fairly high level of development and reflection. In the general landscape of the doctrinal movements of the thirteenth century, the thought of St. Thomas is far from representing the ordinary path of philosophical and theological thought. On the contrary, it can be located by the margins of what was considered permissible at that time⁵.

This volume brings together three works dedicated to different aspects of the philosophical thought of St. Thomas. The first article, by Manuel Martín, entitled *La doctrina tomista de la ley natural en el marco de la participación del hombre en la providencia divina [The Thomistic Doctrine of Natural Law in the Context of Man's Participation in Divine Providence]*, deals with the particular way in which, according to St. Thomas, men are regulated by the eternal law. As the author argues, for St. Thomas, the human being is subject, like every other creature, to the supreme divine ordination, but in a most peculiar way, since he is called, precisely because of his rationality, to be provident for himself and to dictate the natural law to himself. Thanks to his understanding, the human being is capable of becoming aware of himself and of recognizing those things to which it is naturally inclined, in order to decide, freely and rationally, to turn

5 Not long after the death of St. Thomas, a heated dispute broke out among theology masters about the orthodoxy of some Thomistic theses. The discussion, for example, about the alleged scope of the condemnation of 1277 of some theses held by St. Thomas, is well known. For more information regarding this discussion, see Robert Wielockx, "Autour du procès de Thomas d'Aquin," in Albert Zimmermann (ed.), *Thomas von Aquin. Werk und Wirkung im Licht neuerer Forschungen*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1988 [vol. 19 of *Miscellanea Mediaevalia*], pp. 413-438; John Wippel, "Bishop Stephen Tempier and Thomas Aquinas: A Separate Process Against Aquinas?" *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie*, vol. 44, 1997, pp. 117-136; and in response to the latter, Robert Wielockx, "A Separate Process Against Aquinas. A Response to John F. Wippel," in Jacqueline Hamesse (ed.), *Roma, magistra mundi. Itineraria culturae medievalis. Mélanges offerts au Père L. E. Boyle à l'occasion de son 75^e anniversaire*, Louvain-la-Neuve, Brepols, 1998 [vol. 10 of *Textes et Études du Moyen Âge*], pp. 1009-1030. On the so-called *correctoria*'s debate, see Pierre Mandonnet, "Premiers travaux de polémique thomiste," *Revue de Sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, vol. 7, 1913, pp. 46-70; Franz Ehrle, "Der Kampf um die Lehre des hl. Thomas von Aquin in den ersten fünfzig Jahren nach seinem Tode," *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*, vol. 37, 1913, pp. 266-318; Palémon Glorieux, "La littérature des correctoires: simples notes," *Revue Thomiste*, vol. 33, 1928, pp. 69-96; Palémon Glorieux, "Les correctoires. Essai de mise au point," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, vol. 14, 1947, pp. 287-305; Ludwig Hödl, "Geistesgeschichtliche und literarkritische Erhebungen zum Korrektorienstreit (1277-1287)," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale*, vol. 33, 1966, pp. 81-114; Palémon Glorieux, "Pro et contra Thomam. Un survol de cinquante années," in Theodor Köhler (ed.), *Sapientiae procerum amore. Mélanges Médiévistes offerts à Dom Jean-Pierre Müller O.S.B. à l'occasion de son 70^{ème} anniversaire*, Rome, Editrice Anselmiana, 1974 [vo. 63 of *Studia Anselmiana*], pp. 255-287; and more recently Mark Jordan, "The Controversy of the Correctoria and the Limits of Metaphysics," *Speculum*, vol. 57, 1982, pp. 292-314. For a more panoramic view of the reception of the thought of St. Thomas, see Matthew Levering & Marcus Plested (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Reception of Aquinas*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021.

to them in order to attain, by means of such things, the fulfillment they long for. By acting in this way, the human being imitates, in a limited but real way, divine providence itself.

In *Definiendo lo indefinible. El método para conocer la existencia de Dios según Tomás de Aquino y el “unum” argumento de Anselmo de Canterbury* [*Defining the indefinable. The method for knowing the existence of God according to Thomas Aquinas and the ‘unum’ argument of Anselm of Canterbury*], Santiago Corti explores the similarities and differences between the ways of rational access to the existence of God that both medieval thinkers developed in their works. Taking on a distinction that Thomas Aquinas introduces in *Expositio super librum Boethii De Trinitate*, q. 6, a. 3 between a nominal and an actual definition of God, Corti argues that both Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas begin their respective demonstrations of God’s existence by using a nominal definition of God, which merely manifests a general or common—and fundamentally negative—knowledge about what God is. While both thinkers start by giving a nominal definition of God, the great difference between their approaches lies, Corti argues, in what that definition is capable of achieving: while for Thomas it is simply the legitimate starting point of an *a posteriori* demonstration of God - or several demonstrations, to be more precise-, Anselm argues a definition already contains enough strength or content to manifest the evidence of God’s existence in itself.

In his article entitled *El conocimiento de la persona en su singularidad. Una aproximación desde dos exponentes de la Escuela Tomista de Barcelona* [*The knowledge of the person in their uniqueness. An approximation from two exponents of the Thomist School of Barcelona*], Íñigo García investigates the particularities of the way in which Thomas Aquinas conceives the self-knowledge of the human soul. Following the interpretations of Jaime Bofill and Francisco Canals, two of the leading exponents of the so-called Thomistic School of Barcelona, the author explores the peculiarities of the two types of self-knowledge that the soul has of itself, as Thomas Aquinas distinguishes them in *De veritate*, q. 10, a. 8. García argues the knowledge the soul has of itself as a being—existential self-knowledge, as opposed to essential self-knowledge—allows the human beings to recognize not only themselves, but also enables cognitive access to the singularity of other persons, through a sort of immediate and dynamic presence, which the author calls ‘biography’.

Each one in its own way, the three articles highlight the undeniable relevance of Thomas Aquinas' thought in current times. At a distance of more than 700 years, the rigor and insight of his philosophical and theological work have lost none of their original vigor, being able even today to show the contemporary reader ever new paths of illumination and penetration into the central themes of all genuine philosophical and theological reflection: God, the human being and the world. We hope that the reading of these articles will serve as a useful opportunity to delve into the work of one of the most important authors of the Middle Ages and of the long history of Western thought.