

The Problem of Self-Evidence

- “Whether the Existence of God is Self-Evident?”
 - Aquinas, ST, I q.2 a.1.

- I answer that, A thing can be self-evident in either of two ways; on the one hand, self-evident in itself, though not to us; on the other, self-evident in itself, and to us. A proposition is self-evident because the predicate is included in the essence of the subject, as “Man is an animal,” for animal is contained in the essence of man. *If, therefore the essence of the predicate and subject be known to all (per se nota), the proposition will be self-evident to all;* as is clear with regard to the first principles of demonstration, the terms of which are common things that no one is ignorant of, such as being and non-being, whole and part, and such like. If, however, there are some to whom the essence of the predicate and subject is unknown, the proposition will be self-evident in itself, but not to those who do not know the meaning of the predicate and subject of the proposition. Therefore, it happens, as Boëthius says (Hebdom., the title of which is: “Whether all that is, is good”), “that there are some mental concepts self-evident only to the learned, as that incorporeal substances are not in space.” Therefore I say that this proposition, “God exists,” of itself is self-evident, for the predicate is the same as the subject; because God is His own existence as will be hereafter shown (Q. III., A. 4). Now because we do not know the essence of God, the proposition is not self-evident to us; but needs to be demonstrated by things that are more known to us, though less known in their nature—namely, by effects.

-
- For it is simply self-evident that God is, because the selfsame thing which God is, is His existence. But since we are unable to conceive mentally the selfsame thing which is God, that thing remains unknown in regard to us.

◎ ...man desires Him naturally in so far as he naturally desires happiness, which is a likeness of the divine goodness. Hence it does not follow that God considered in Himself is naturally known to man, but that His likeness is. Wherefore man must needs come by reasoning to know God in the likenesses to Him which he discovers in God's effects.

Praeambula Fidei

- Whether or not Thomas sees the science of philosophy as grounding the science of theology, or if his system is grounded, from the beginning, in his theology.
- The traditional Roman and Thomistic view, in place for seven hundred years or so, affirmed that *purely philosophical "preambles of the faith"* are set forth in Thomas as necessary in order properly to assess the knowledge of God.

Ralph McInerny

- Flawed understandings of the nature of Christian philosophy, a tendency to disparage the natural [i.e., philosophical] in favor of the supernatural [i.e., theological], the suggestion that the philosophy of St. Thomas is to be found only in his theological works, and cannot be separated from them...had the effect of weakening the notion of *praeambula fidei*.

Thomas on “preambles”

- The existence of God and other like truths about God, which can be known by natural reason, are not articles of faith, but are *preambles to the articles* (*non sunt articuli fidei, sed praeambula ad articulos*); for faith presupposes natural knowledge, even as grace presupposes nature, and perfection supposes something that can be perfected.
 - Aquinas, ST, I.q.2 a.2 ad 1, my emphasis.

● Our interest here, however, is twofold:

- (1) the traditional Thomist/Roman view has its roots in Thomas's unquestionable affirmation of "pure nature" or "natural reason," entailing as it does the lack of the self-evidence of God's existence, as the foundation for his entire system and
- (2) due to (1), the discipline of apologetics is rooted in the *principium* of human reason, which of itself, according to Thomas, is able to produce, by way of demonstration, a true theology.
- This is the sum of McInerny's entire argument.

-
- If, as the new view would have it, Thomas's notion of "being" is strictly revelational, such that it can only be understood within the context of Exodus 3:14, then "natural reason," and the lack of self-evidence of God's existence, have no proper place to lay their heads.

Critique

● Reason and Revelation

- Having shown then that it is not futile to endeavour to prove the existence of God, we may proceed to set forth the reasons whereby both philosophers and Catholic doctors have proved that there is a God. In the first place we shall give the arguments by which Aristotle sets out to prove God's existence...
- Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles, 1.23.