



# The New Neo-Scholasticism

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*Abstract.* The last quarter of a century has seen the rise of what can aptly be labeled a new Neo-Scholastic trend in philosophy and theology. After explaining what Scholasticism and Neo-Scholasticism are, the article describes the origins, themes, and key thinkers of this latest iteration of Scholasticism that is taking up the mantle of the old.

## I. Introduction

This journal was founded almost a century ago under the title *The New Scholasticism*, at a time when Neo-Scholastic thought dominated Catholic philosophy and theology. It acquired its current title at the beginning of the 1990s, in the wake of Neo-Scholasticism's apparent demise in the decades after the Second Vatican Council. Yet the same decade saw the beginnings of a revival of interest in Scholastic thought, a revival that has grown considerably in the decades since. One might even say that it has yielded a new Neo-Scholasticism, and one with certain advantages over the old. Here I offer a primer on this new Neo-Scholasticism. To understand it, though, we need first to understand what Scholasticism is, and what Neo-Scholasticism is.

## II. What Is Scholasticism?

Scholasticism is the approach to philosophy and theology that dominated Western thought for several centuries beginning in the High Middle Ages, from the time of St. Anselm (1033–1109) to that of John Capreolus (1380–1444). Its best-known representatives also include St. Bonaventure (c. 1221–1274), St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274), Bl. John Duns Scotus (c. 1266–1308), and William of Ockham (c. 1287–1347). It enjoyed a brief revival during the Counter-Reformation period from about 1520–1640, when it was represented

by “Second Scholastic” thinkers like Luis de Molina (1535–1600) and Francisco Suárez (1548–1617).

The main intellectual roots of Scholasticism are twofold. First, there is the Augustinian tradition, together with the Neo-Platonism that tradition was built on. Second, there is the Aristotelian tradition, including the Arabic commentators through whom it was mediated to Western scholars of the High Middle Ages. While Scholastic thinkers tend to exhibit both Augustinian and Aristotelian influences, in some the first influence dominates and in others the second does. Lloyd Gerson has plausibly argued that the broadly Platonic and Aristotelian strands of Western thought have enough in common that they really comprise a single “Ur-Platonist” tradition, whose representatives are members not of two families but of one extended family.<sup>1</sup> With important qualifications, I would suggest that Scholasticism is in part what results when Christian theology is articulated in terms of some brand of Ur-Platonism, and that the unity of the Ur-Platonist tradition is part of what accounts for the unity of Scholasticism.<sup>2</sup>

But that is *only* a part of the story, as is evident from the fact that there were, long before the rise of Scholasticism as we usually think of it, Christian thinkers who were influenced by this tradition. A key additional note of Scholasticism is its *rigor and systematicity*. This involves practices such as the careful definition of key terms and the drawing of fine conceptual distinctions; precise formulations of propositions to be defended or criticized; explicit and carefully constructed arguments; the identification and defense of the presuppositions behind the premises of arguments until first principles are reached; the consideration of the variety of objections that might be raised against a claim or argument, and of the replies that might be developed against such objections; working the key findings of a specific domain of study into an organized body of knowledge; and attention to how each of these branches of knowledge connects to the others. This is not to say that any of these elements is ubiquitous in Scholastic writing, but that together they represent an ideal of rigor to which the work of different Scholastic thinkers approximates to various degrees.

Connected to the features of Scholasticism described so far is its nature as a *collective enterprise*, to which a multitude of thinkers across space and time contributed. Scholastic analysis, argumentation, and system-building was

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<sup>1</sup>Lloyd P. Gerson, *From Plato to Platonism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013). An earlier version of the idea was developed in Lloyd P. Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

<sup>2</sup>The qualifications are needed because not everything Gerson says necessarily applies to every Scholastic. For example, his later exposition in *From Plato to Platonism* takes antinomialism to be among the notes of the Ur-Platonist tradition, which would exclude Scholastics like Ockham. But it is worth noting, in this connection, that many modern Scholastics would take the rise of nominalism to be precisely one of the key factors behind the unraveling of medieval Scholasticism.

conducted in part in written form, embodied both in commentaries on the works of previous thinkers in the tradition, and in independent treatises which also showed the influence of those thinkers. These independent treatises would then be commented upon by later Scholastics who would also write their own independent treatises, and so on, so that the Scholastic intellectual edifice, like a medieval cathedral, was the work of many generations.<sup>3</sup> There was also the institution of the *university* or community of teachers and students, in which the Scholastic tradition was passed on and developed further, and where mastery of it involved a formal course of study and the give and take of debate. In these ways, Scholasticism was not the work merely of isolated thinkers of genius, but a common intellectual culture to which many contributed.

As to its theological content, the spirit of Scholasticism is aptly summed up in Anselm's famous motto *fides quarens intellectum* or "faith seeking understanding." Questions about the relationship between faith and reason are far from the whole of Scholastic theology, but they are at the heart of it. It became standard to draw careful distinctions between the spheres of reason and faith and between the natural and the supernatural. Some Scholastics have greater optimism about what reason can accomplish apart from the deliverances of revelation, some less. But they apply to theology the same rigor and systematicity they apply to philosophy. They tend also to hold (albeit with varying degrees of ambition) that reason can not only help articulate, clarify, and defend the deliverances of revelation, but can also accomplish the apologetic task of establishing that a divine revelation has in fact occurred. At the same time, they hold that the truths of revelation are higher than those attainable by unaided reason, and correct errors to which unaided reason is prone. Unsurprisingly, some critics of Scholasticism accuse it of excessive rationalism, while others accuse it of excessive fideism; and some of its critics tend to emphasize the natural order at the expense of the supernatural, whereas others emphasize the supernatural at the expense of the natural. Scholasticism aimed in the case of each distinction precisely to achieve the proper balance.

Finally, something should be said about the relationship between Scholasticism and modern science. Though the modern conventional wisdom would have it that Scholasticism was refuted by the Scientific Revolution, that is not the case. Though it took some time for the tradition clearly to draw it, there is a distinction between Aristotelian physics and Aristotelian philosophy of nature. Modern science refuted the former but not the latter. And though medieval Aristotelian Scholastics were committed to both, it is only the latter that is truly essential to their worldview.

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<sup>3</sup>I borrow the analogy from Maurice De Wulf, *An Introduction to Scholastic Philosophy: Medieval and Modern* (Dublin: M. H. Gill and Son, 1907), 48.

For another thing, there is a sense in which modern science is in fact one of the fruits of Scholasticism rather than something inherently at odds with it. According to the Scholastics' Aristotelian philosophy of nature, created things have intrinsic natures and causal powers that can be studied independently of their divine first cause. This makes possible the idea of a natural science that is independent of theology. There could be no such science if we took every natural event to be an immediate manifestation of divine action, as medieval Islamic occasionalism did. The Scholastics' confidence in the power of reason, their rigor and systematicity, and their communal practice of the life of inquiry in the university, made possible an institutionalized natural science. Historian of science Edward Grant has argued that these factors were essential to modern science's having arisen where and when it did.<sup>4</sup>

Why did Scholasticism decline?<sup>5</sup> Part of the reason, of course, is precisely because it had been so closely intertwined with the medieval science that Galileo, Newton, and company overthrew. Though it could be, and eventually would be, separated out from that science, the intellectual challenge this task posed, and the rhetorical blow the failure of Aristotelian physics inflicted, set Scholasticism back on its heels. There was also a major political aspect to the story. Because Scholasticism had been so closely associated with the medieval Church and the political order that upheld it, Protestants and early modern liberals had a strong motivation to attack it (even if, as it happens, at least some of them continued to sympathize with parts of it).

But there was also a self-inflicted wound. When Renaissance humanists derided the arid and pedantic character of the Scholasticism of their day, there was much truth in the charge. Later Scholastic writing sometimes did descend into self-caricature, with hair-splitting that could make the enterprise appear to be more a game of words than an investigation of reality. This was only exacerbated by the influence of nominalism on late Scholasticism. In the work of lesser thinkers, Scholasticism could also degenerate into the mere parroting of theses and lines of argument inherited from the tradition. There were, as well, Scholastics who too stubbornly clung to the Aristotelian science that was being overthrown, reinforcing in the minds of their critics the impression that Scholasticism's philosophical baby needed to be thrown out with its scientific bathwater. All of this contributed to making Scholasticism appear insular and intellectually sterile, even if this was true only of a late period of Scholasticism rather than of Scholasticism itself.

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<sup>4</sup>Edward Grant, *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>5</sup>Cf. De Wulf, *An Introduction to Scholasticism*, pt. I, chap. III for a useful discussion.

### III. What Is Neo-Scholasticism?

Neo-Scholasticism flourished for about a century, from the middle of the nineteenth century until the Second Vatican Council. It was kicked into high gear by Pope Leo XIII's promotion of the movement in his 1879 encyclical *Aeterni Patris*. Prominent representatives include Josef Kleutgen (1811–1883), Cardinal Désiré-Joseph Mercier (1851–1926), Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange (1877–1964), Jacques Maritain (1882–1973), and Etienne Gilson (1884–1978) (albeit the latter was critical of some aspects of Neo-Scholasticism).

Neo-Scholasticism sought to restore the Scholastic tradition in all its essential elements. It judged modern philosophy from Descartes onward to have been, in the main, a catastrophic mistake, to which the revival of Scholasticism was the needed corrective. But it did not pretend that merely reminding us of what Aquinas and other great Scholastics had to say was sufficient, nor deny that reform of Scholasticism was needed. In particular, it rejected the outmoded natural science with which medieval Scholasticism had been associated, and tried to show that what is essential to Scholasticism is compatible with modern science rightly understood. In this connection, it aimed to clarify the distinction between questions of empirical science and questions of philosophy of nature that earlier Scholasticism had left murky. It did not ignore, but sought to defuse, the epistemological problematic raised by post-Cartesian and post-Kantian philosophy. Accordingly, it took a more systematic approach to questions in the theory of knowledge than pre-modern Scholasticism had.

In these ways, Neo-Scholasticism attempted to rebut the charge that what modern thought reveals about knowledge in general and scientific knowledge in particular renders pre-modern philosophy obsolete. It also emphasized the need actively to engage with modern empirical science and modern schools of philosophy, rather than retreating into an insular and defensive position. It aimed to do so with the same rigor and systematicity of medieval Scholasticism at its best, but without pretending that this required a nostalgic recourse to exactly the same literary forms (such as the writing of commentaries or *Summae*).

Related to this was a revival of an ambitious fundamental theology or apologetics that emphasized the ability of natural reason to establish both the preambles of faith (such as the existence and attributes of God) and the motives of credibility (such as the historicity of Christ's Resurrection). Neo-Scholasticism also emphasized the distinction between the natural and supernatural orders, against modernists who tended to collapse the supernatural down into the natural order, and against *nouvelle theologie* writers who appeared to absorb the natural order up into the supernatural.

Why was Neo-Scholasticism driven into the margins after Vatican II, and so abruptly? Part of the reason had to do with the content of Neo-Scholastic thought,

and part of it with the manner in which Neo-Scholasticism was presented. In my view, the first set of criticisms, concerning the content of Neo-Scholasticism, are without merit. The second set of criticisms, concerning the manner in which it was presented, were exaggerated, but do contain some truth. Let's consider these sets of criticisms in turn.<sup>6</sup>

Among the objections to the content of Neo-Scholasticism, the first were philosophical. Some critics judged the very idea of reviving Scholasticism in general and Aristotelianism in particular to be a fool's errand, an exercise in nostalgia that could not speak to modern man. Some disagreed with the Neo-Scholastics' wholesale critique of modern thought and judged that Catholic theology needed to accommodate itself to post-Kantian philosophy and could find much of positive value in certain modern schools of thought. Some instead accused the Neo-Scholastics of being too modern, and in particular of having corrupted Scholasticism by reading into it the rationalism of Christian Wolff. Neo-Scholastics were thus routinely accused both of too slavishly following Aquinas, and at the same time of departing too far from him!

Other objections to the content of Neo-Scholasticism were theological. It was accused of drawing too sharp a divide between the natural and the supernatural, with the first of these "two tiers" so sealed off from the second that it implied that man has no natural need for God. This, it was claimed, unwittingly gives aid and comfort to modern atheism. In moral theology, the Neo-Scholastics were accused of a legalistic moral minimalism that required of the Christian only a conformity to the letter of the law. This is alleged to be a consequence of an excessively law-oriented approach to morality that traces to the voluntarism and nominalism of William of Ockham. Neo-Scholasticism was also alleged to rely too much on Aristotelian philosophy and not enough on scripture and the Fathers of the Church.

As I have said, I don't think these criticisms have merit. Obviously, they raise a variety of complex issues that I cannot address in any detail here, but the following remarks will suffice for present purposes. First, the claim that Aristotelianism could not be resuscitated, and would not speak to modern people even if it could be, has been proven false by events. For as we will see presently, Aristotelian ideas have in fact in recent decades enjoyed a revival, even outside Thomistic and Catholic circles, in mainstream contemporary philosophy. Contemporary philosophy has also seen a revival of old-fashioned metaphysics more generally, and the development of lines of thought critical of the assumptions of post-Cartesian and post-Kantian epistemology. There has also been a revival of interest in the history of late Scholastic and early modern philosophy, and a

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<sup>6</sup>Cf. Edward Feser, "In Defence of Scholasticism," *The Venerabile* 35, no. 4 (2015): 21–6.

renewed appreciation for the sophistication of the Scholastics and of the ways that early modern criticisms of Scholasticism were often superficial.

In short, mainstream contemporary philosophy provides ingredients for precisely the sort of revival of Scholasticism, and critique of its modern rivals, that the Neo-Scholastics argued for. This doesn't entail that a Neo-Scholastic can learn nothing from modern schools of thought, or that those who find something of value in these schools ought to reject Neo-Scholasticism. That is a false choice. To be sure, much depends on exactly which ideas we are talking about. But in the abstract, Neo-Scholastics can acknowledge and incorporate insights from modern philosophers just as medieval Scholastics acknowledged and incorporated insights drawn from pagan, Jewish, and Muslim thinkers.

Turning to the theological objections, the allegation that Neo-Scholasticism makes of the natural order something self-contained and independent of God is absurd. It would be plausible if Neo-Scholastics conceived of nature the way modern philosophical naturalism does, but of course they do not. Rather, with classical philosophical theists like Aristotle and Plotinus, they take God's existence to be demonstrable by natural reason from the natural order he has made. Hence the Neo-Scholastic conception of nature, far from facilitating atheism, positively excludes it. For Neo-Scholasticism, it is not knowledge of God as such that surpasses our natural powers, but rather the intimate knowledge of the divine nature that is entailed by the beatific vision. In emphasizing that such knowledge is beyond our natural powers, Neo-Scholasticism was simply concerned, as Pope Pius XII was in *Humani Generis*, to counter theological doctrines which "destroy the gratuity of the supernatural order" by conflating it with the natural order.

As to the accusation of legalism, the notion that moral principles have the character of law is hardly an invention of medieval voluntarism and nominalism. It has always been a component of a biblically-grounded morality. (Moses was hardly an Ockhamite!) There is in any case bound to be a "legal" aspect to any workable system of ethics. We need to know how to apply general moral principles to concrete circumstances, and working this out carefully and systematically entails that casuistry will be a part of any serious moral theory. There is also the fact that the priests for whom Neo-Scholastic ethics manuals were largely written needed guidance in the confessional, as did their penitents. That required principles for distinguishing mortal sin from venial sin (and thus grave matter from light matter, sufficient knowledge from insufficient, sufficient consent from insufficient) in all the areas of human life where we find ourselves tempted. This too inevitably gives rise to a system of casuistry. Hence, it was not Ockhamism or "legalism" that yielded the approach of the Neo-Scholastic manuals of moral theology. That approach was inevitable given the nature of the moral life and the sacrament of penance.

Finally, the most obvious problem with the idea that Neo-Scholasticism owed more to Aristotelian philosophy than to scripture and the Church Fathers is that by far the greatest influence on the Neo-Scholastics was Aquinas. And Aquinas's thought, for all its dependence on Aristotle, was also utterly permeated with scriptural and patristic influences. That is not to deny that there are always further insights to be drawn from scripture and the Fathers. But to draw them need not be to reject Neo-Scholasticism. It can instead be a matter of supplementing what is already in it.

Let us turn now to objections to the way in which Neo-Scholasticism was presented. The style of Neo-Scholastic writing has frequently been characterized as spiritually arid or dry as sawdust, for which reason it was denigrated as "sawdust Thomism." Neo-Scholastic manuals were also accused of largely repeating each other and of presenting stock ideas and arguments in a rote manner. Furthermore, Neo-Scholasticism's hegemony owed largely to its promotion by ecclesiastical authorities who were not always themselves known for philosophical or theological acumen. This gave it the feel of a stifling orthodoxy that was imposed from the top down, rather than an intellectually serious movement that had to earn its way through the give and take of debate—and an orthodoxy that was too often confused with theological orthodoxy.

The first thing to say about these objections is that, whatever their rhetorical power, they in no way refute any Neo-Scholastic claim or argument. Whether a claim is true or an argument is cogent simply has nothing at all to do with how dryly it has been presented, how robotically it has been repeated, or what authority has promoted it. The second thing to say is that the criticisms are exaggerated. The work of Neo-Scholastics like those named above was often of high intellectual quality, engaging in style, and could stand on its own merits without the need of ecclesiastical backing. The third thing to say is that there is nevertheless some truth in the criticisms, and that the Neo-Scholastic movement was harmed by the excessively dry, rote, and authoritarian manner in which it was too often presented.<sup>7</sup> Again, in no way does this derogate from the philosophical and theological power of Neo-Scholastic arguments, which in my view is considerable. But it is a cautionary tale for those who would revive Neo-Scholasticism.

#### IV. What Is the New Neo-Scholasticism?

Fortunately, what I am calling the "new Neo-Scholasticism" does not have these particular problems. For one thing, it is not an intellectual orthodoxy imposed

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<sup>7</sup>For an engaging account of what it was like to be a seminarian studying philosophy in the Neo-Scholastic period, see chapter III of Anthony Kenny, *A Path from Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

by authority from above, nor even an organized school of thought whose members self-identify as “new Neo-Scholastic” or by way of any other standard label (though most would probably call themselves Thomists). Rather, it is a trend that has arisen organically and informally as interest in Aristotelian, Thomistic and other Scholastic ideas has spread within secular and Catholic academia alike over the last three decades or so. There is no rote presentation of a party line but rather thinkers of diverse intellectual backgrounds rediscovering and working out Scholastic themes and lines of argument in a largely independent and sometimes idiosyncratic way. Accordingly, there is also a diversity of styles of writing and presenting material rather than a single house style.

There were two general factors in academic philosophy in the period between Vatican II and the late 1990s that prepared the way for the new Neo-Scholasticism. The first was a revival of interest, within mainstream secular circles, of ideas that were either Aristotelian or adjacent to Aristotelianism. The work of Saul Kripke and Hilary Putnam in analytic philosophy of language and metaphysics made essentialism a respectable position again beginning in the 1970s.<sup>8</sup> This was not Aristotelian essentialism, exactly, but it made it easier for other analytic philosophers to reconsider the Aristotelian approach, as thinkers like Kit Fine would by the nineties.<sup>9</sup> In philosophy of science, Nancy Cartwright argued that modern physics not only has not refuted the Aristotelian notion of natures or essences, but implicitly presupposes it.<sup>10</sup> Theories of causal powers reminiscent of those that featured in Aristotelian Scholasticism were developed by Cartwright, C. B. Martin, and Rom Harré and E. H. Madden.<sup>11</sup> In ethics, writers like Alasdair MacIntyre, Philippa Foot, and Martha Nussbaum revived interest in the Aristotelian virtue-centered approach to moral philosophy.<sup>12</sup> In history of philosophy, scholars like Marilyn McCord Adams, Anthony Kenny, Norman Kretzmann, Dennis Des Chene, and Richard Cross revealed how

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<sup>8</sup>Hilary Putnam, “The Meaning of ‘Meaning’” in Putnam, *Mind, Language, and Reality: Philosophical Papers, Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); and Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1980).

<sup>9</sup>Kit Fine, “Essence and Modality,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 8 (1994): 1–16.

<sup>10</sup>Nancy Cartwright, “Aristotelian Natures and the Modern Experimental Method,” in *Inference, Explanation, and Other Frustrations: Essays in the Philosophy of Science*, ed. John Earman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>11</sup>C. B. Martin, “Properties and Dispositions,” in D. M. Armstrong, C. B. Martin, and U. T. Place, *Dispositions: A Debate*, ed. Tim Crane (London: Routledge, 1996); and Rom Harré and E. H. Madden, *Causal Powers* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975).

<sup>12</sup>Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); and Martha Nussbaum, “Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach,” in *The Quality of Life*, ed. Martha C. Nussbaum and Amartya Sen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

sophisticated, and different from stock caricatures, were the actual views of medieval and late Scholastic thinkers.<sup>13</sup>

The second relevant factor was that although the influence of Thomism and other Scholastic ideas greatly declined among Catholic philosophers after Vatican II, it did not disappear entirely. There remained a remnant of Catholic thinkers who, though they were not all influenced by Neo-Scholasticism, specifically, continued to do philosophy in a way that was either broadly Thomistic or at least deeply influenced by Aquinas. This group included Elizabeth Anscombe, Peter Geach, Ralph McInerny, Joseph Owens, John Knasas, John Finnis, James Ross, David Burrell, Herbert McCabe, Brian Davies, John Haldane, Gyula Klima, Barry Miller, David Braine, Christopher F. J. Martin, and others.<sup>14</sup> Important work on the history of medieval and later Scholastic philosophy was also done by scholars like Alfred Freddoso, William A. Wallace, and James Weisheipl.<sup>15</sup> There was enough work of a broadly Thomistic kind being done even in analytic

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<sup>13</sup>Marilyn McCord Adams, *William Ockham*, 2 vols. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987); Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism: Aquinas's Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles I* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Dennis Des Chene, *Physiologia: Natural Philosophy in Late Aristotelian and Cartesian Thought* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>14</sup>G. E. M. Anscombe, *Ethics, Religion and Politics: The Collected Philosophical Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe, Volume 3* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981); P. T. Geach, *The Virtues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Ralph McInerny, *Ethica Thomistica* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1982); Joseph Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1985); John Knasas, *The Preface to Thomistic Metaphysics* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990); John Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); James F. Ross, *Philosophical Theology* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969); David Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979); Herbert McCabe, *God Matters* (London: G. Chapman, 1987); Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); J. J. C. Smart and J. J. Haldane, *Atheism and Theism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); Gyula Klima, *Ars Artium: Essays in Philosophical Semantics, Mediaeval and Modern* (Budapest: Institute of Philosophy of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1988); Barry Miller, *A Most Unlikely God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996); David Braine, *The Reality of Time and the Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); and Christopher F. J. Martin, *Thomas Aquinas: God and Explanations* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997).

<sup>15</sup>Alfred Freddoso, "Medieval Aristotelianism and the Case against Secondary Causation in Nature," in *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988); William A. Wallace, *Causality and Scientific Explanation, Volume I: Medieval and Early Classical Science* (Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1981); James A. Weisheipl, *Nature and Motion in the Middle Ages* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1985).

philosophy circles that, by the late 1990s, Haldane could propose “analytical Thomism” as a label for an emerging approach in philosophy.<sup>16</sup>

It would be silly to pretend that a precise date can be assigned to the rise of what I am calling “the new Neo-Scholasticism,” but I would propose that it began around the early 2000s, and in part precisely as a result of Haldane’s having provided a useful label. To be sure, “analytical Thomism” does not really name a school of thought with a distinctive set of doctrines or methods. It is essentially just a name for a group of thinkers who have in common only that they are interested in both analytical philosophy and Thomism, and try to combine these interests. Nor does it appear to be a label that all philosophers who might be thought of as “analytical Thomists” actually apply to themselves. But it did afford a way of identifying a real, albeit inchoate, trend in contemporary philosophy. And for younger philosophers interested in Thomism and other Scholastic ideas, it facilitated awareness that there were other, already established thinkers of like mind, so that pursuing work in this vein might be a realistic academic career option.

A number of books appeared in the 2000s that, I would argue, played a key role in facilitating the new interest in Scholasticism. This includes two anthologies with which Haldane was involved, which helped bring awareness to “analytical Thomism” and the philosophers associated with it.<sup>17</sup> In 2003, Eleonore Stump published a massive, magisterial study of Aquinas that both elucidated his thinking on a wide variety of issues for contemporary philosophers, and brought it into engagement with discussions in contemporary analytic philosophy in a more systematic way than had been done before.<sup>18</sup> John Wippel had, not long before, published a no less massive and magisterial work that also greatly illuminated Aquinas’s thought, but with a focus on its original historical and intellectual context.<sup>19</sup>

Kenny’s *Aquinas on Being* appeared around the same time.<sup>20</sup> It was highly critical of Aquinas’s metaphysics from a point of view deeply informed by modern analytic philosophy, and important for precisely that reason. For it forced those interested in the relationship between Thomism and analytic philosophy

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<sup>16</sup>See Haldane’s introduction to *The Monist* 80, no. 4 (1997), a special issue devoted to “Analytical Thomism.”

<sup>17</sup>John Haldane, ed., *Mind, Metaphysics, and Value in the Thomistic and Analytical Traditions* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002); and Craig Paterson and Matthew S. Pugh, eds., *Analytical Thomism: Traditions in Dialogue* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006). Haldane contributed to the latter volume an Afterword on the state of analytical Thomism.

<sup>18</sup>Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>19</sup>John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000).

<sup>20</sup>Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Being* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

to confront head-on the question of whether Aquinas's notion of being, which is at the heart of his metaphysics, could be defended today despite being at odds with assumptions that had come to be taken for granted in modern analytic thought. Many Thomists decided that it could be and should be.<sup>21</sup> Robert Pasnau's *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature* was also critical of Aquinas, but nevertheless expounded and analyzed his philosophical anthropology in depth and treated it as something with which contemporary philosophers ought to engage.<sup>22</sup> Fergus Kerr noted the new interest in Aristotle and Aquinas among some analytic philosophers in *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism*.<sup>23</sup>

There were also works which unapologetically and even aggressively pitted the Thomistic position against contemporary orthodoxy in analytic philosophy. In 2004, Davies published the third edition of his *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, and in 2006 his book *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*.<sup>24</sup> Davies argued that prominent contemporary philosophers of religion such as Alvin Plantinga and Richard Swinburne were committed to an excessively anthropomorphic conception of God, which Davies labeled "theistic personalism." In Davies's view, this conception has done great harm, impairing contemporary philosophers' understanding of key issues such as the problem of evil. Davies and philosophers influenced by him have urged a rejection of much contemporary philosophy of religion in favor of a return to the classical theism of the great Greek and medieval philosophers.

In 2000, David Oderberg published a major two-volume exposition and defense of a Thomistic natural law approach to ethics, vigorously opposing it to the conventional wisdom in contemporary moral philosophy.<sup>25</sup> 2007 saw the publication of his book *Real Essentialism*, which no less vigorously defended an Aristotelian-Thomistic approach to a wide variety of issues in metaphysics, in conversation with, but once again in opposition to, contemporary orthodoxy in analytic philosophy.<sup>26</sup> In the late 2000s, Edward Feser published a widely-read introduction to Aquinas, as well as a semi-popular work responding to the

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<sup>21</sup>For one important example, see Gyula Klima, "On Kenny on Aquinas on Being," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (2004): 567–80.

<sup>22</sup>Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>23</sup>Fergus Kerr, *After Aquinas: Versions of Thomism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

<sup>24</sup>Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Brian Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* (London: Continuum, 2006).

<sup>25</sup>David S. Oderberg, *Moral Theory: A Non-Consequentialist Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000); and Oderberg, *Applied Ethics: A Non-Consequentialist Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000).

<sup>26</sup>David S. Oderberg, *Real Essentialism* (London: Routledge, 2007).

New Atheism from a Thomistic point of view.<sup>27</sup> These books argued, contrary to the standard view in analytic philosophy of religion at the time, that Aquinas's arguments for God's existence, especially the First Way and the argument of *De Ente et Essentia*, were not only still defensible but ought once again to be made central to philosophical theology and apologetics.

The work mentioned so far in most cases came from a Catholic academic context. But the 2000s also saw an acceleration of the neo-Aristotelian trends in mainstream secular academic philosophy mentioned earlier. This was the case, for example, in ethics and action theory. In 2001, Philippa Foot's *Natural Goodness* appeared, and defended a broadly Aristotelian essentialist and teleological approach to moral philosophy.<sup>28</sup> Candace Vogler's account of practical reason in *Reasonably Vicious* drew heavily on Aquinas.<sup>29</sup> Michael Thompson's *Life and Action* defended a broadly Aristotelian account of both of the concepts referred to in its title.<sup>30</sup> Scott Sehon and G. F. Schueler argued that human action is irreducibly teleological in nature.<sup>31</sup> There were also many important volumes defending neo-Aristotelian positions in metaphysics. Versions of essentialism broadly Aristotelian in spirit were defended by Brian Ellis, Crawford Elder, George Molnar, and Michael Devitt.<sup>32</sup> A category ontology reminiscent of Aristotle's was defended by E. J. Lowe;<sup>33</sup> a neo-Aristotelian theory of substance by Kathrin Koslicki;<sup>34</sup> and a defense of Aristotelian teleology by Monte Ransome Johnson.<sup>35</sup> This secular neo-Aristotelian revival could hardly fail to give aid and comfort to those advocating a reconsideration of Thomistic and other Scholastic ideas.

In addition to the number and visibility of such works, a crucial factor is the *confidence* with which Thomist and neo-Aristotelian views began to be defended in the 2000s. Given that such views were very much on the defensive during the last third of the twentieth century, those then advocating them would,

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<sup>27</sup>Edward Feser, *Aquinas* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009); and *The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2008).

<sup>28</sup>Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

<sup>29</sup>Candace Vogler, *Reasonably Vicious* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

<sup>30</sup>Michael Thompson, *Life and Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>31</sup>Scott Sehon, *Teleological Realism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005); and G. F. Schueler, *Reasons and Purposes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

<sup>32</sup>Brian Ellis, *Scientific Essentialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Ellis, *The Philosophy of Nature: A Guide to the New Essentialism* (Chesham: Acumen, 2002); Crawford L. Elder, *Real Natures and Familiar Objects* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2004); George Molnar, *Powers: A Study in Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Michael Devitt, "Resurrecting Biological Essentialism," *Philosophy of Science* 75 (2008): 344–82.

<sup>33</sup>E. J. Lowe, *The Four-Category Ontology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006).

<sup>34</sup>Kathrin Koslicki, *The Structure of Objects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>35</sup>Monte Ransome Johnson, *Aristotle on Teleology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

understandably, sometimes do so in a modest or qualified way, aware that they were likely to be met with raised eyebrows or worse. The 2000s saw Thomists and neo-Aristotelians go on offense, as it were, more boldly arguing that the conventional wisdom was simply wrong, and indeed that modern philosophy in general had too glibly dismissed ancient and medieval ideas that had been right after all, or at least were still perfectly defensible. Arguably, among those who might be labeled analytical Thomists, more were beginning to emphasize the “Thomist” part over the “analytical” part—to see themselves as simply Thomists who happened to have a background in analytic philosophy, rather than as analytic philosophers with an interest in Thomism.

I have been emphasizing developments in philosophy, but theology too saw during this decade a revival of interest in Thomism, and indeed in Neo-Scholasticism. Lawrence Feingold defended the distinction between the natural and the supernatural that had made Neo-Scholastics a target of *nouvelle theologie* criticism.<sup>36</sup> Fr. Thomas Joseph White argued for the revival of Thomistic natural theology.<sup>37</sup> Dominican theologians Richard Peddicord and Aidan Nichols published important studies of Garrigou-Lagrange.<sup>38</sup> Also extremely important was the founding of the Thomistic Institute in 2009 by Fr. White, then at the Pontifical Faculty of the Immaculate Conception at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington, D.C. Its regular academic conferences facilitated the formation of an intellectual community of like-minded scholars committed to the preservation, development, and promotion of Thomistic and related ideas. Its many campus chapters, and the public lectures by academics sympathetic to Thomism that they have sponsored, helped to familiarize a younger generation of academics with Scholastic ideas, and thereby expanded the community of those sympathetic to these ideas.

It is the convergence of these various factors in the 2000s which, I suggest, gave rise to what I am describing as a new Neo-Scholasticism. And developments over the last fifteen years have consolidated the trend. The neo-Aristotelian movement in mainstream academic philosophy has not only accelerated, but done so perhaps most dramatically in metaphysics and the philosophy of nature, where Aristotelian ideas would have been thought by previous generations to be least susceptible of revival. There have been a number of major anthologies devoted

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<sup>36</sup>Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Rome: Appoline Studi, 2001).

<sup>37</sup>Thomas Joseph White, *Wisdom in the Face of Modernity: A Study in Thomistic Natural Theology* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2009).

<sup>38</sup>Richard Peddicord, *The Sacred Monster of Thomism: An Introduction to the Life and Legacy of Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2005); and Aidan Nichols, *Reason with Piety: Garrigou-Lagrange in the Service of Catholic Thought* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2008).

to neo-Aristotelian work in these fields.<sup>39</sup> Hylomorphic accounts of substance have been defended by Koslicki, William Jaworski, and Anna Marmodoro;<sup>40</sup> and defenses of a neo-Aristotelian account of causal powers by Rani Lill Anjum and Stephen Mumford.<sup>41</sup> Aristotelianism has even seen a revival in the philosophy of biology, as evidenced by work from Christopher Austin, Stephen Boulter, William M. R. Simpson, and others.<sup>42</sup> Thomas Nagel has joined those proposing a revival of Aristotelian teleology.<sup>43</sup>

In the context of Thomism, thinkers like MacIntyre, Haldane, Stump, Davies, and Klima, who carried the tradition through the wilderness period of the late twentieth century, have continued to publish and to have a major influence. Much further important work in metaphysics has been done by Oderberg, Feser, Jeffrey Brower, Fr. James Rooney, Michael Gorman, and others.<sup>44</sup> The compatibility of Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy of nature with modern science has been defended by Feser and Robert Koons.<sup>45</sup> In natural theology, traditional Thomistic arguments for God's existence have been defended at length

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<sup>39</sup>Tuomas E. Tahko, ed., *Contemporary Aristotelian Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Ruth Groff and John Greco, eds., *Powers and Capacities in Philosophy: The New Aristotelianism* (London: Routledge, 2013); Edward Feser, ed., *Aristotle on Method and Metaphysics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Daniel D. Novotny and Lukas Novak, eds., *Neo-Aristotelian Perspectives in Metaphysics* (London: Routledge, 2014); William M. R. Simpson, Robert C. Koons, and Nicholas J. Teh, eds., *Neo-Aristotelian Perspectives on Contemporary Science* (London: Routledge, 2018); and William M. R. Simpson, Robert C. Koons, and James Orr, eds., *Neo-Aristotelian Metaphysics and the Theology of Nature* (London: Routledge, 2022).

<sup>40</sup>Kathrin Koslicki, *Form, Matter, Substance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); William Jaworski, *Structure and the Metaphysics of Mind: How Hylomorphism Solves the Mind-Body Problem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Anna Marmodoro, "Aristotle's Hylomorphism without Reconditioning," *Philosophical Inquiry* 36 (2013): 4–22.

<sup>41</sup>Stephen Mumford and Rani Lill Anjum, *Getting Causes from Powers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Rani Lill Anjum and Stephen Mumford, *What Tends to Be: The Philosophy of Dispositional Modality* (London: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>42</sup>Christopher J. Austin, *Essence in the Age of Evolution* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019); Stephen Boulter, *Metaphysics from a Biological Point of View* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); William M. R. Simpson, *Hylomorphism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

<sup>43</sup>Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>44</sup>David S. Oderberg, *The Metaphysics of Good and Evil* (London: Routledge, 2020); Edward Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* (Heusenstamm: Editiones Scholasticae, 2014); Jeffrey E. Brower, *Aquinas's Ontology of the Material World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); James Dominic Rooney, *Material Objects in Confucian and Aristotelian Metaphysics* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2022); Michael Gorman, *A Contemporary Introduction to Thomistic Metaphysics* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2024).

<sup>45</sup>Edward Feser, *Aristotle's Revenge: The Metaphysical Foundations of Physical and Biological Science* (Seelscheid: Editiones Scholasticae, 2019); Robert C. Koons, *Is St. Thomas's Philosophy of Nature Obsolete?* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2022).

by Feser, Gaven Kerr, and Daniel Shields.<sup>46</sup> Works on Thomistic philosophical anthropology have been published by Feser, James Madden, Steven Jensen, and Adam Wood.<sup>47</sup> Much Thomistic work also continues to be done in defense of a natural law approach to ethics in general,<sup>48</sup> and on specific ethical controversies.<sup>49</sup> There is also renewed interest in other great Scholastic thinkers, such as Scotus and Suárez.<sup>50</sup>

Meanwhile, in theology, major Thomistic works on the Trinity have been published by Fr. White and Fr. Dominic Legge;<sup>51</sup> on the Incarnation by White and Gorman;<sup>52</sup> on divine action by Fr. Michael Dodds;<sup>53</sup> on nature and grace by Steven Long and Fr. Bernard Mulcahy;<sup>54</sup> on fundamental theology by White

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<sup>46</sup>Edward Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017); Gaven Kerr, *Aquinas's Way to God: The Proof in De Ente et Essentia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Daniel Shields, *Nature and Nature's God: A Philosophical and Scientific Defense of Aquinas's Unmoved Mover Argument* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2023).

<sup>47</sup>Edward Feser, *Immortal Souls: A Treatise on Human Nature* (Seelscheid: Editiones Scholasticae, 2024); James D. Madden, *Mind, Matter, and Nature: A Thomistic Proposal for the Philosophy of Mind* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2013); Steven J. Jensen, *The Human Person* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018); and Adam Wood, *Thomas Aquinas and the Immateriality of the Human Intellect* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2020).

<sup>48</sup>See, e.g., several of the articles in Tom Angier, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Natural Law Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Steven J. Jensen, *Good and Evil Actions* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010); and Jensen, *Knowing the Natural Law* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015).

<sup>49</sup>See, e.g., Peter Karl Koritansky, *Thomas Aquinas and the Philosophy of Punishment* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012); Gregory M. Reichberg, *Thomas Aquinas on War and Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); and Mary L. Hirschfeld, *Aquinas and the Market: Toward a Humane Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

<sup>50</sup>Cf. Giorgio Pini, ed. *Interpreting Duns Scotus: Critical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Thomas M. Ward, *Ordered by Love: An Introduction to John Duns Scotus* (Brooklyn: Angelico Press, 2022); and Daniel Schwartz, ed., *Interpreting Suárez: Critical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>51</sup>Thomas Joseph White, *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2022); and Dominic Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>52</sup>Thomas Joseph White, *The Incarnate Lord: A Thomistic Study in Christology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2015); and Michael Gorman, *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of the Hypostatic Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>53</sup>Michael Dodds, *Unlocking Divine Action: Contemporary Science and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012).

<sup>54</sup>Steven A. Long, *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010); and Bernard Mulcahy, *Aquinas's Notion of Pure Nature and the Christian Integralism of Henri de Lubac* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011).

and Feingold;<sup>55</sup> and on the development of doctrine by Guy Mansini.<sup>56</sup> Matthew Minerd has translated several important works by Garrigou-Lagrange and other Neo-Scholastic thinkers which had previously been unavailable in English.<sup>57</sup> Others have produced English translations of work by Scholastic thinkers such as Cajetan, and of the nineteenth century dogmatic theologian Matthias Joseph Scheeben.<sup>58</sup>

The lists of scholars and works that I've given here have by no means been exhaustive. Many more could have been named (and I apologize to any who should have been!). But this much suffices to indicate how large is the amount, and how wide the range, of work being done today of an Aristotelian, Thomistic, or otherwise Scholastic kind. Let me end by calling attention to some general features of this new neo-Scholasticism. First, it is often (even if not always) radical and systematic. That is to say, the contemporary thinkers who draw inspiration from Aristotle, Aquinas, and other Scholastics often advocate more than merely recovering this or that particular insight from the tradition. Rather, they are often willing to challenge the deepest metaphysical assumptions of modern philosophy, to favor a return to some version of (what I have, following Gerson, called) the "Ur-Platonist" tradition, and to see that this is bound to have implications across the board, in areas of philosophy beyond metaphysics.

Second, the work done by these writers is often of high intellectual quality, rigorously argued, well-informed about competing ideas, and engaging head-on with those ideas. This is in part because such high intellectual standards are part of the Scholastic ideal itself; in part because many of those contributing to the neo-Scholastic revival have backgrounds in analytic philosophy, which has traditionally prized such rigor; and in part because Aristotelian, Thomistic, and other Scholastic ideas have for so long been considered passé that only considerable intellectual effort could have brought them once again into the conversation.

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<sup>55</sup>Thomas Joseph White, *Principles of Catholic Theology, Book 2: On the Rational Credibility of Christianity* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2024); and Lawrence Feingold, *Faith Comes from What is Heard: An Introduction to Fundamental Theology* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2016).

<sup>56</sup>Guy Mansini, *The Development of Dogma: A Systematic Account* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2014).

<sup>57</sup>See e.g., Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *The Order of Things: The Realism of the Principle of Finality*, trans. Matthew Minerd (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2020); and Jon Kirwan and Matthew Minerd, eds., *The Thomistic Response to the Nouvelle Théologie* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2023).

<sup>58</sup>Cf. William Marshner's multi-volume translation of Cajetan's commentary on Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* for Catholic University of America Press in 2024, and Michael J. Miller's multi-volume translation of Scheeben's *Handbook of Catholic Dogmatics* published by Emmaus Academic beginning in 2019.

Third, the Catholics who have contributed to this Scholastic revival tend to be orthodox in their theological convictions, and, like the Scholastics of old, confident in reason's ability to articulate and defend Catholic orthodoxy. This makes the revival especially timely in an era when the rational credentials of the Catholic faith have come under unprecedented attack from outside the Church, and when doctrinal confusion is rife within the Church.

Fourth, as I have said, this new Neo-Scholasticism does not show the foibles of its late nineteenth- and twentieth-century predecessor, because it has not been generated and imposed from the top down by ecclesiastical authority. It has, instead, grown organically in a "grassroots" fashion, and in part from trends that originated outside the Church. This has prevented it from developing a rote "party line" style of which the original Neo-Scholasticism was accused. It also promises to give the new Neo-Scholasticism more staying power, because it is less likely to be subject to the vicissitudes of ecclesiastical fashion and Church politics.

Those of us who have contributed to this revival of Scholasticism would also argue that it has the truth on its side. This is said not out of arrogance, but on the contrary out of deep reverence for and humility before a great tradition and the intellectual giants who built it, who have much to teach us if only we would once again open our ears and our minds to them.

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