wisdom as aiming at achieving "a form of understanding that may bring mankind peace of mind." This envisions the prospect of a completion or perfection that I view as decidedly unrealistic. For I see the human situation in a less optimistic light as a stage of struggle and striving. The battle against the forces of ignorance and incomprehension is endless. And, even more importantly, intellectual innovation also brings new challenges. Behind every "solution" there lurk further difficulties, behind every answer come further questions. If wisdom consists (as I incline to think it does) in an ability to see things as they are, then the incompletability and imperfectability of our philosophizing is something with which we must come to terms. For in the intellectual as in the moral life there are no permanent victories to be achieved and no rest short of the grave. As I see it, the cognitive condition of man in this vale of tears is something we may come to view with resignation (*Gelassenheit*) but never with rational contentment (*Zufriedenheit*). There are no permanent victories to be won in man's intellectual struggle for understanding.

Thomas D. Sullivan

Though John Haldane and others have made a strong case for bringing the thought of St. Thomas into cognitive contact with contemporary analytical philosophy, the proposal is bound to elicit two familiar objections.

First, the Theoretical Historicist will argue that the temporal and cultural distance separating us from Aquinas prevents us from making any informative comparison between Aquinas' work and what is going on today. It is pointless to ask whether Kripke lends support to Aquinas on essence or whether contemporary physicalism spells ruin for his teaching on the soul. Such questions presuppose that Aquinas' philosophy can be lifted out of its original environment and compared with other systems similarly disembedded from their attendant conditions. And that, the Theoretical Historicist insists, is an elementary mistake.

Occasionally friends of Aquinas sound like Theoretical Historicists. 'The real question' Etienne Gilson once wrote, 'is to know whether one can snatch a philosophy from the milieu in which it was born and plant it elsewhere away from the environment in which it ever

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has actually existed, and not destroy it.' The expected answer to this tendentiously phrased question would seem to be 'Obviously not.' Yet, as Gilson himself certainly realized, there had better be some sense in which what Aquinas wrote can be 'snatched' from its original milieu, if it is to be of any use to us at all. What is the point of carefully working through Aquinas' arguments for, say, God's existence if his arguments are so time-bound we cannot now say with Aquinas things like: 'It is evident to sense that some things move'?

Despite rhetorical excesses, the considered opinion of most Thomists seems to be that there is indeed a sense in which Aquinas' arguments can be lifted out of their historical milieu. Still, even as they reject Theoretical Historicism, many embrace 'Practical Historicism.' Neglect of the new is sometimes rooted in distaste for what contemporary philosophy has to offer. It may be objected, in Haldane's nice phrase, that analytical philosophy lacks a *telos*. But frequently Practical Historicists offer another explanation of their refusal to see Aquinas through the lens of any contemporary philosophy: the danger of anachronism.

The Practical Historicist protests that it is all very well at some point to consider the significance of Aquinas' work for our times, but we can neither test Aquinas' ideas nor apply his principles without first grasping what they are. Before we try to answer questions about the relationship between Aquinas' thought and the thought of Frege or Wittgenstein or Russell or Putnam or Quine, we must get a good hold on Aquinas' own thought, as he expressed it in terms no longer easily understood by us. We have no business asking questions of the form 'Could Aquinas be right about x, given what S has said on the matter?' until we grasp clearly Aquinas' views on x. Moreover, it is exceedingly difficult to understand Aquinas well. It takes years to get a decent grip on his basic arguments and their interconnections. Before passing judgment on fragments of his thought, the scholar must see his reasoning unfold across a vast corpus of writings. Furthermore, there can be no proper understanding of what Aquinas was arguing without grasping the problems he inherited from a long and rich tradition of philosophy stretching from the Greeks, through the fathers of the Church, into medieval Jewish, Islamic, and Christian thought. The responsible scholar cannot just pick up Aquinas, read an argument, and then rush out to see what the analysts have said on the subject. To approach Aquinas through the lens of analytical philosophy is to run the unacceptable risk of supplanting the original communication with a surrogate. Whatever interest such an artifact of anachronistic imaginings may have—little, in all likelihood—the task of anyone who

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sets out to understand Aquinas is to understand him, not an effigy decked out in the latest intellectual fashion.

One might be tempted to reply that while the Practical Historicists are right about the need to get a grip on the backdrop of Aquinas' thought, they take so long with their preliminary work, they never get to the payoff. Like the scholars Kierkegaard speaks of in another context, Practical Historicists get lost in an infinite parenthesis. To understand Aquinas' position on form and matter, they reason, we must first understand the issues that prompted Aristotle to originate the hylomorphic hypothesis. And to understand Aquinas' discussion of essence and existence we must first see how the issues were set out in Avicenna. And to understand Aquinas on the essence of God, we must first understand how the problematic unfolded in the texts of Moses Maimonides. Since these and a dozen other issues are connected, there is scarcely an end to the research that must be done, and done well, before we are in any position to compare Aquinas with the likes of Russell, Quine or Chisholm. The upshot is that while the Practical Historicist disagrees with the Theoretical Historicist in principle, in practice it all comes to the same: Aquinas becomes utterly irrelevant to anything going on today.

In line with Haldane's observations about the current state of affairs, the entry on 'Neo-thomism' in the Oxford Companion to Philosophy informs the reader: 'Since then [Vatican II], neo-Thomism has tended to become largely historical and to be submerged in the study of medieval philosophy'. But lamenting the influence of the Practical Historicism in our time hardly proves the position is mistaken. What, after all, is really wrong with the Practical Historicist's argument? Yes, many exhaust themselves in historical studies in preparation for a day that never arrives when Aquinas' better ideas are integrated into a modern world-view, but if it does takes a very long time to come to understand Aquinas well, and if understanding must precede comparison and judgment, then how can we avoid marching right down the same path as the Practical Historicist?

The answer is that, happily, one of the Practical Historicist's assumptions is false. It simply is not the case that before we consider A's thought in relation to B's, we must first clearly grasp A's position. This is because possible interpretations of a position come to light as a result of comparison. In particular, it often happens that we come to understand a position well only by considering closely subsequent criticism made of it.

In illustration, consider how St. Thomas' criticism of a determinist argument clarifies the original argument. The determinist argues that

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since God knows everything and since whatever God knows necessarily happens, the future is entirely fixed. Aquinas points out that the sentence 'Whatever God knows necessarily happens' can be understood in two ways:

Necessarily, if God knows *h* will happen then *h* will happen.
(Nec: GKh => h)
and
(B) If God knows *h* will happen, then *h* necessarily happens.
(GKh => Nec h)

Aquinas argues that on the (A) reading, the claim is true, but the premise will not yield the conclusion that everything is determined by the knowledge of God, while on the (B) reading, the deterministic conclusion would follow, but there is no reason to think that (B) is true. For present purposes the issue itself is not important. What is important is that we don't understand the original statement of the argument for determinism well until we see a potential rebuttal like Aquinas'. Only after the relevant distinctions are drawn does it become clear that at least two different arguments crowd under the same verbal umbrella. Thanks to Aquinas' reply to the objection we now can see that the original objection to freedom on the part of the determinist is open to more than one interpretive possibility.

This example suggests why analytical philosophy is especially useful for coming to understand Aquinas' own arguments. Aquinas brings out an ambiguity by invoking a logical distinction between *de re* and *de dicto* necessity, a distinction probably unknown to the earliest advocates of the deterministic argument. In turn, analytical philosophers today often invoke new distinctions applicable to Aquinas' own work with illuminating results.

Consider, for example, the claim that Aquinas makes in the third of his five arguments in the *Summa Theologiae* for God's existence: 'If all things are such that they could not-be, then at some time there was nothing at all.' The standard analytical criticism of this part of his argument is that Aquinas makes an illicit logical move. Reversing the order of quantifiers, Aquinas in effect moves from 'for all *x* there is a *y* such that' to 'there exists a *y* such that for all *x*.' (Compare the move from 'Every dog has a tail' to 'There is some tail which every dog has.') We need not go into the details of this accusation to realize that unless some other interpretation can be given Aquinas' argument, it is fallacious. By putting pressure on the argument we are forced to consider interpretive possibilities that might otherwise have escaped our notice. Haldane and other commentators argue that Aquinas can

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legitimately be rescued from the charge of making a quantifier exchange mistake, but however this may be, the important point is that thanks to analytical philosophy we now are in a better position to work out the interpretive possibilities. The same point could be made a dozen different ways. Over and over again when one reads Aquinas through the lens of analytical philosophy, it becomes plain that Aquinas' contentions can be understood in more than one way.

The Practical Historicist presumes full clarity about a position can be achieved before it is submitted to a scrutiny that takes advantage of distinctions and insights that have become available after its original articulation. This mistake, I think, is largely responsible for the regrettable submergence of Aquinas' thought in medieval philosophy.

1 Etienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, translated by L.K. Shook, equivalent of the 5th and last French edition, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), p. 22.
2 Mark Jordan, 'Neo-Thomism,' in Ted Honderich, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 615.
3 J.J.C. Smart and J.J. Haldane, *Atheism and Theism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 132.
4 Aquinas, for example, claims it is evident that 'every whole is greater than its parts' Analysts mindful of Galileo and Cantor will spontaneously ask whether Aquinas means to include infinite sets.

Charles Taylor

An analytical Thomism seems to me an excellent idea, but for a more general reason. This is that analytical philosophy, like some gins, is much better in a cocktail than taken neat.

Analytic philosophy, as it has developed, is a mixture of a style of philosophising on one hand, that stresses rigour and clarity, and a tendency towards a narrowing of the philosophical imagination, on the other. I don't think there is any necessary link between these two facets. It's all a matter of where the style grew up. And although the picture of it as emerging out of "positivism" is something of a caricature, the truth is that the intellectual milieux in which it evolved in the Anglo-Saxon world were generally anti-metaphysical (in one case, anti-Hegelian, because in a huge reaction against the British Hegelians), and usually hostile to religious faith as well.

Nothing prevents these two sides from being dissociated, and the style from being extended to discuss other ideas and insights than

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