Scholasticism

An Introduction to a Monastic Method of Philosophical Reasoning

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Introduction

Scholasticism was a medieval school of philosophy that employed a critical organic method of philosophical analysis predicated upon the Aristotelian 10 Categories. Christian Scholasticism emerged within the monastic schools that translated scholastic Judeo-Islamic philosophies and thereby "rediscovered" the collected works of Aristotle.

Endeavoring to harmonize his metaphysics and its account of a prime mover with the Latin Catholic dogmatic trinitarian theology, these monastic schools became the basis of the earliest European medieval universities, contributing to the development of modern science; Scholasticism dominated education in Europe from about 1100 to 1700. The rise of Scholasticism was closely associated with these schools that flourished in Italy, France, Portugal, Spain, and England.

Scholasticism is a learning method more than philosophy or theology since it strongly emphasizes dialectical reasoning to extend knowledge by inference and resolve contradictions.

Scholastic thought is also known for rigorous conceptual analysis and carefully drawing distinctions. In the classroom and writing, it often takes the form of explicit disputation; a topic drawn from the tradition is broached as a question, oppositional responses are given, a counterproposal is argued, and oppositional arguments are refuted. Because of its emphasis on rigorous dialectical methods, Scholasticism was eventually applied to many other fields of study.

Scholasticism was initially a program conducted by medieval Christian thinkers attempting to harmonize the various authorities of their tradition and to reconcile Christian theology with classical and late antiquity philosophy, especially that of Aristotle and Neoplatonism.

The Scholastics, also known as Schoolmen, included as its prominent figures Anselm of Canterbury ("the father of scholasticism"), Peter Abelard, Alexander of Hales, Albertus Magnus, Duns Scotus, William of Ockham, Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas.

Aquinas's masterwork Summa Theologica (1265–1274) is considered to be the pinnacle of scholastic, medieval, and Christian philosophy; it began while Aquinas was a regent master at the studium provinciale of Santa Sabina in Rome, the forerunner of the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas, Angelicum. Important work in the scholastic tradition has been carried on well past Aquinas's time, such as English scholastics Robert Grosseteste and his student Roger Bacon,

and for instance by Francisco Suárez and Luis de Molina, and also among Lutheran and Reformed thinkers.

Etymology

The terms "scholastic" and "scholasticism" derive from the Latin word scholastics, the Latinized form of the Greek σχολαστικός (scholastics), an adjective derived from σχολή (scholē), "school." Scholasticus means "of or pertaining to schools." The "scholastics" were, roughly, "schoolmen."

History

Boethius laid the foundations of Christian Scholasticism through his logical and theological essays, and later forerunners (and then companions) to Scholasticism were Islamic Ilm al-Kalām, literally "science of discourse," and Jewish philosophy, especially Jewish Kalam.

The first significant renewal of learning in the West came with the Carolingian Renaissance of the Early Middle Ages. Charlemagne, advised by Peter of Pisa and Alcuin of York, attracted the scholars of England and Ireland. By decree in AD 787, he established schools in every abbey in his empire. From which the name scholasticism is derived, these schools became centers of medieval learning.

During this period, knowledge of Ancient Greek had vanished in the West except in Ireland, where its teaching and use were widely dispersed in monastic schools. Irish scholars had a considerable presence in the Frankish court, where they were renowned for their learning. Among them was Johannes Scotus Eriugena (815–877), one of the founders of Scholasticism. Eriugena was the most significant Irish intellectual of the early monastic period and an outstanding philosopher in terms of originality. He was familiar with Greek and translated many works into Latin, affording access to the Cappadocian Fathers and the Greek theological tradition.

This period began the 'rediscovery' of many Greek works lost to the Latin West. As early as the 10th Century, the Toledo School of translators in Spain had begun to gather translated texts and,

in the latter half of that Century, began transmitting them to the rest of Europe. After a triumphant burst of Reconquista in the 12th Century, Spain opened even further for Christian scholars, and as these Europeans encountered Judeo-Islamic philosophies, they opened a wealth of Arab and Judaic knowledge of mathematics and astronomy. Scholars such as Adelard of Bath traveled to Spain and Sicily, translating works on astronomy and mathematics, including the first complete translation of Euclid's Elements into Latin.

At the same time, Anselm of Laon systematized the production of the gloss on Scripture, followed by the rise to prominence of dialectic (the middle subject of the medieval trivium) in the work of Abelard. Peter Lombard produced a collection of Sentences or opinions of the Church Fathers and other authorities.

In the early 13th Century, a syndicate of priests and scholars collaborated and sketched a rough draft of a raw market economy. These scholars and priests fostered Christianity and addressed the philosophical issues of early economic thought. Christianity, the fundamental faith that shaped these groups' moral attitudes, was primarily transitioned from patristic Christology. It adopted patristic culture and matured its way through the medieval age. Leinsle (2010) confirms the permeation of patristic Christology into Scholastic theology by arguing that medieval theology did not develop itself through philosophical contact.

The Christian Theologians first introduced the early set of trade rules. Theologians had spiritual beliefs with morals driven by religion. Novikoff (2012), in his narrative, describes the belief system of the Scholastics. He elaborates that scholastics adopted their moral and ethical behaviors from the early theologians. Early theologians, mainly Christians, accepted a specific set of rules from the Christian Bible as their outlook model. Spiegel (1991) highlights that scholastic economic thought had its principal sources in the Bible.

He further emphasizes the teachings and writings of the Father of the Church, which designed the groundwork for exercising economic and moral thoughts. Later, in the ages, the scholastics used the writings of Aristotle to shape their philosophical perspective. Greek Philosophy was deemed the foundation for early moral principles which the scholastics exercised. Greek philosophy

became the initiating stance of high Scholasticism. The preaching of such tenets was mainly transitioned from Italian to European localities.

The 13th and early 14th centuries are generally seen as the high period of Scholasticism, and the early 13th Century witnessed the culmination of the recovery of Greek philosophy. Schools of translation grew up in Italy and Sicily and eventually in the rest of Europe. Powerful Norman kings gathered men of knowledge from Italy and other areas into their courts as a sign of prestige. William of Moerbeke's translations and editions of Greek philosophical texts in the middle half of the thirteenth Century helped form a clearer picture of Greek philosophy, particularly of Aristotle than was given by the Arabic versions on which they had previously relied. Edward Grant writes, "Not only was the structure of the Arabic language radically different from that of Latin, but some Arabic versions had been derived from earlier Syriac translations and were thus twice removed from the original Greek text. Word-for-word translations of such Arabic texts could produce tortured readings. By contrast, the structural closeness of Latin to Greek permitted literal but intelligible, word-for-word translations."

Universities developed in the large cities of Europe during this period, and rival clerical orders within the church began to battle for political and intellectual control over these centers of academic life. The two main orders founded in this period were the Franciscans and the Dominicans. The Franciscans were founded by Francis of Assisi in 1209.

Their leader in the middle of the Century was Bonaventure, a traditionalist who defended the theology of Augustine and the philosophy of Plato, incorporating only a little of Aristotle with the more Neoplatonist elements. Following Anselm, Bonaventure supposed that reason can only discover the truth when philosophy is illuminated by religious faith. Other important Franciscan scholastics were Duns Scotus, Peter Auriol, and William of Ockham.

By contrast, the Dominican, a teaching order founded by St Dominic in 1215 to propagate and defend Christian doctrine, emphasized reason and extensively used the new Aristotelian sources derived from East and Moorish Spain. The great representatives of Dominican thinking in this period were Albertus Magnus and (especially) Thomas Aquinas, whose artful synthesis of Greek

rationalism and Christian doctrine eventually defined Catholic philosophy. Aquinas placed more emphasis on reason and argumentation and was one of the first to use the new translation of Aristotle's metaphysical and epistemological writing. This was a significant departure from the Neoplatonic and Augustinian thinking that had dominated much of early Scholasticism. Aquinas showed how it was possible to incorporate much of the philosophy of Aristotle without falling into the "errors" of the Commentator, Averroes.

Neo-Scholasticism

The revival and development from the second half of the 19th Century of medieval scholastic philosophy are sometimes called neo-Thomism.

Thomistic Scholasticism

As J. A. Weisheipl O.P. emphasizes, within the Dominican Order, Thomistic Scholasticism has been continuous since the time of Aquinas: "Thomism was always alive in the Dominican Order, small as it was after the ravages of the Reformation, the French Revolution, and the Napoleonic occupation. Repeated legislation of the General Chapters, beginning after the death of St. Thomas and the Constitutions of the Order, required all Dominicans to teach the doctrine of St. Thomas both in philosophy and theology."

Thomistic Scholasticism or scholastic Thomism identifies with the philosophical and theological tradition stretching back to the time of St. Thomas. It focuses not only on the exegesis of the historical Aquinas but also on articulating a rigorous system of orthodox Thomism to critique contemporary thought. Due to its suspicion of attempts to harmonize Aquinas with non-Thomistic categories and assumptions, Scholastic Thomism has sometimes been called, according to philosophers like Edward Feser, "Strict Observance Thomism."

A discussion of recent and current Thomistic Scholasticism can be found in La Metafisica di san Tommaso d'Aquino e i suoi interpreti (2002) by Battista Mondin, which includes such figures as Sofia Vanni Rovighi (1908–1990), Cornelio Fabro (1911–1995), Carlo Giacon (1900–1984), Tomas

Tyn O.P. (1950–1990), Abelardo Lobato O.P. (1925–2012), Leo Elders (1926–) and Giovanni Ventimiglia (1964–) among others. Other scholars, such as those involved with the "Progetto Tommaso," seek to establish an objective and universal reading of Aquinas' texts. Fabro, in particular, emphasizes Aquinas' originality, especially concerning the actus essendi or act of existence of finite beings by participating in being itself.

Thomistic Scholasticism in the English-speaking world declined in the 1970s when the Thomistic revival spearheaded by Jacques Maritain, Étienne Gilson, and others diminished in influence. Partly, this was because this branch of Thomism had become a quest to understand the historical Aquinas after the Second Vatican Council.

Analytical Scholasticism

A renewed interest in the "scholastic" way of doing philosophy has recently awakened in the confines of analytic philosophy. Attempts emerged to combine elements of scholastic and analytical methodology in pursuit of a contemporary philosophical synthesis. Proponents of various incarnations of this approach include Anthony Kenny, Peter King, Thomas Williams, and David Oderberg. Analytical Thomism can be seen as a pioneer part of this movement.

Scholastic method

Cornelius O'Boyle explained that Scholasticism focuses on acquiring knowledge and communicating effectively so that others may receive it. It was thought that the best way to achieve this was by replicating the discovery process (modus inveniendi).

The scholasticists would choose a book by a renowned scholar, auctor (author) as a subject for investigation. The disciples learned to appreciate the author's theories by reading them thoroughly and critically. Other documents related to the book would be referenced, such as Church councils, papal letters, and anything else written on the subject, be it ancient or contemporary.

The points of disagreement and contention between multiple sources would be written down in individual sentences or snippets of text, known as sententiae. Once the seeds and facts of disagreement had been laid out through a series of dialectics, the two sides of an argument would be made whole to be found to agree and not contradictory; sometimes, opinions would be rejected or new positions proposed.

This was done in two ways. The first was through philological analysis. Words were examined and argued to have multiple meanings. It was also considered that the auctor might have intended a specific word to mean something different. Ambiguity could be used to find common ground between two otherwise contradictory statements. The second was through logical analysis, which relied on the rules of formal logic – as they were known at the time – to show that contradictions did not exist but were subjective to the reader.

Scholastic instruction

Scholastic instruction consists of several elements. The first was the Lectio: a teacher would read an authoritative text followed by a commentary, but no questions were permitted. This was followed by the meditatio (meditation or reflection), in which students reflected on and appropriated the text. Finally, in the quaestio, students could ask questions (quaestiones) that might have occurred to them during meditatio. Eventually, the discussion of questions became a method of inquiry apart from the lectio and independent of authoritative texts. Disputationes were arranged to resolve controversial quaestiones.

Questions to be disputed were ordinarily announced beforehand, but students could propose a question to the teacher unannounced – disputationes de quodlibet. In this case, the teacher responded, and the students rebutted; on the following day, the teacher, having used notes taken during the disputation, summarised all arguments and presented his final position, riposting all rebuttals.

The quaestio method of reasoning was initially used, especially when two authoritative texts seemed to contradict one another. Two contradictory propositions would be considered an

either/or question, and each part of the question would have to be approved (sic) or denied (non). Arguments for the position taken would be presented, followed by arguments against the position, and finally, the arguments against would be refuted. This method forced scholars to consider opposing viewpoints and defend their arguments against them.