AQUINAS ON THE DEMONSTRABILITY OF GOD'S EXISTENCE: SOME LESSONS FROM SUMMA THEOLOGICA I, Q. 2, A. 2

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I. Introduction

Summa Theologica I, 2, 2 is located in the center of an ingenious trilogy of questions concerning the existence of God:[1]

I, q. 2 a. 1: Whether the existence of God is self–evident?

I, q. 2, a. 2: Whether it can be demonstrated that God exists?

I, q. 2, a. 3: Whether God exists?

My task in this article is not primarily to give yet another historical commentary on this comparatively well–known text (although I will do that to a certain extent), but to draw some lessons from it for a *contemporary* philosophical theology, especially with regard to its relations to theology and to philosophy of religion. Moreover, the focus of my interest will not be on Aquinas' own solution (in the so–called *corpus articuli*, i. e. the passage introduced with "I answer that."), but rather on the critical discussion of the objections offered in the text; those objections contain some challenges that are still relevant and which any satisfactory philosophical theology must meet.

II. *The norm of demonstration: the epistemic syllogism*

The result of STh I, q. 2 a. 1 (Whether the existence of God is self–evident?) is that God's existence is not self–evident or known by itself (*per se notum*), at least not for our epistemic equipment. Hence, God's existence is in need of demonstration relatively to us. This result naturally leads Aquinas to the ques-

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1   All references to Aquinas from: *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*. Second and Revised Edition 1920. Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Online Edition 2000 by Kevin Knight. http://www.newadvent.org/summa.

tion of how such a demonstration could be established, and how it relates to demonstrations in other disciplines. This is the topic of STh I, q. 2 a. 2.

According to the Aristotelian–scholastic philosophy of science, the benchmark of a strict scientific demonstration, at least in academic disciplines other than philosophy, is the epistemic syllogism. Epistemic syllogisms must obey the following formal and material criteria. *Formally*, an epistemic syllogism is (1) an argument which (2) consists of three sentences (2 premises, 1 conclusion), which (3) are all categorical assertions of one of the four possible forms (SaP, SiP, SeP, SoP). Further it is required (4) that exactly three predicates/concepts/terms[2] each appear twice in this argument, and (5) that the argument formally obeys one of the 19 logically valid forms (*modi*) of syllogism. From this minimal description it easily follows that (6) one of the terms appears only in the premises, but not in the conclusion: the so–called middle–term (*medium, terminus medius,* or *media extremitas*).

Materially, it is required that (7) the premises of the argument are true and certain, and (8) that the middle–term indicates the factual reason for the truth of the conclusion. To illustrate this, I refer to the following, well–known example:

PREMISE	All organically composed things are mortal.	Ma P
PREMISE	All living things are organically composed.	S a M
CONCLUSION	All living things are mortal.	S a P

"Being organically composed" is the middle–term in this example, and constitutes the reason why the conclusion should be acknowledged as true.

It is obvious that this requirement (8) could lead us into trouble in the case of God's existence, since no factual reason for God's existence can be named: it seems to belong crucially to any suitable concept of "God" that "God" is something like the ultimate ground of reality, and that hence he cannot be grounded in something else — otherwise it would not be "God" what we are talking about, but some inner–worldly entity. Aquinas does not explicitly adress this point here, but it can be seen that he tacitly applies a somewhat weaker concept of "demonstration" (*demonstratio*) in this context, i. e. weaker than "epistemic syllogism" and allowing "demonstrations" in a weaker, wider sense. This can be seen from the corpus articuli, the central passage contain-

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2   The somewhat ambiguous description is deliberately chosen here. From the standpoint of contemporary logic, epistemic syllogisms come close to predicate–logical arguments. However, within modern (extensional) predicate logic, not all features of epistemic syllogism can be accounted for; there is an irreducible aspect of intensional logic, of a logic of concepts and their contents, involved here.

ing Aquinas' own solution. To sum up this solution: Taking up an Aristotelian distinction, Aquinas holds that demonstrations for God's existence are "demonstrations–that", not "demonstrations–why": They do not give any factual reasons why God exists, but they give conclusive arguments that he exists. They proceed from the experientially accessible effects (i. e. some features of the world) to the existence of God as their hidden, but necessary cause.[3] Without explicitly addressing this point, Aquinas would also hold that these demonstrations must of course be formally correct, i. e. logically valid. For the medieval logician, this would have meant that the single steps of the demonstration proceed more or less in a syllogistic style, and hence the requirements (1)–(7) are (more or less[4]) met.

III. *For and against the demonstrability of God's existence: Lessons from Aquinas' discussion*

Following the normal scholastic *quaestio*–scheme of scientific presentation, Aquinas first sketches some arguments which seem to undercut the solution he himself favors (*videtur quod non.)* ; in STh I, q. 2 a. 2, there are three of them. What might strike the contemporary reader is their topicality for current discussions in the philosophy of religion: condensed in a nutshell, these arguments contain some standard reservations, arising from philosophical or religious considerations that are still topical, against the very idea of a philosophical theology.

1. Isn't God's existence a question of faith? At the beginning, Aquinas summarizes a widely–held position which in our days is often attributed to Karl Barth and other Protestant theologians, but which — in the form of a general, implicit or explicit scepticism regarding philosophical arguments for religious

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3   *I answer that, Demonstration can be made in two ways: One is through the cause, and is called "a priori," and this is to argue from what is prior absolutely. The other is through the effect, and is called a demonstration "a posteriori"; this is to argue from what is prior relatively only to us. When an effect is better known to us than its cause, from the effect we proceed to the knowledge of the cause. And from every effect the existence of its proper cause can be demonstrated, so long as its effects are better known to us; because since every effect depends upon its cause, if the effect exists, the cause must pre–exist. Hence the existence of God, in so far as it is not self–evident to us, can be demonstrated from those of His effects which are known to us.*

4   Some special problems appear here, e. g. since at a certain point singular terms must come into play, whereas syllogisms (in the narrower sense) only admit of general terms. For contemporary logical reconstructions of the demonstrations for God's existence see F. Ricken (ed.), *Klassische Gottesbeweise in der Sicht der gegenwärtigen Logik und Wissenschaftstheorie*. 2., revised edition. Stuttgart–Berlin–Köln 1998.

claims — is widespread among theologians and believers of all confessions. This scepticism can have different reasons, philosophical as well as religious. Let us begin with the religious reasons: Beliving in God's existence, it is often said, is a matter of faith; philosophical arguments cannot help here, or, even worse, they can even destroy the act of faith as an existential, radical act of freedom, trust and love. Such positions seem to depend on a presupposition which can be expressed roughly as follows: if God's existence appears as the conclusion of a strong argument, accepting this conclusion loses much of its freedom, depth and religious value. Believing in a God whose existence is demonstrable would not in principle differ from believing in the existence of extra–galactic planets, prime numbers greater than 1012, or other hypothetical entities. No heroism or free existential decision is required to believe in the existence of such entities, and hence all efforts to make God's existence appear as the conclusion of a sort of demonstration should be rejected from a religious point of view. The other, more strictly philosophical line of objection arises from an epistemological consideration: Faith, believing–in–God, is often thought of as necessarily incompatible with knowledge. Hence, any attempt to defend our belief in God's existence by assimilating it to a sort of knowledge destroys faith. Hence, faith cannot be a matter of demonstration. Here is Aquinas' text: *It seems that the existence of God cannot be demonstrated. For it is an article of faith that God exists. But what is of faith cannot be demonstrated, because a demonstration produces scientific knowledge; whereas faith is of the unseen (Heb. 11: 1). Therefore it cannot be demonstrated that God exists.* Aquinas' sketch of the argument stresses the second, epistemological line: faith and knowledge are here being presented as epistemic states that are mutually exclusive. The argument is obviously a weak one, for there are other ways of understanding the relationship between faith and knowledge; and the reference to Scriptural authority (Heb. 11: 1) may indicate that Aquinas is also attributing to his imaginary opponent a tacit religious argument of the kind indicated above.[5]

1.1 *Some epistemological clarifications: The ambiguity of "belief" and "to believe".* Without going deeper into an analysis of the complex concept of faith", we can state that one component of "faith" is a sort of belief. And it is a deep–rooted conviction of speakers of many languages that "believing that p" necessarily excludes "knowing that p", and in this sense the idea that also faith

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5   Obviously no exegetical claim is being made here, either about Heb. 11: 1 in itself, or about what Aquinas took that text to mean. We should not forget that the quality of the counter–arguments listed at the beginning of a scholastic articulus can differ. In many cases they are informal and underdeveloped, simply sketching out some ideas which are likely spontaneously to arise in connection with the question.

is knowledge–excluding has a certain plausibility. Questions like "Do you *know* that he took away the book or do you just *believe* it?" give support to this view, and in some languages it has even condensed to proverbs like *Glauben heißt nichts wissen* (German), *Vjera je neznanje* (Croatian) etc., all of them versions of "To believe is not–to–know".[6] However, there are also other senses of "belief". In German as well as in English there are at least three usages of the word:[7]

a) Belief as a necessary constituent of knowledge: According to a classical, however problematic definition, to know that p one must (1) believe that p, (2) have a sufficient justification that p, and (3) p must be true. Trivially, however notoriously problematic this account of knowledge and belief may be, the sense of "belief" invoked here is not knowledge–excluding.

b) Belief as mere expression of one's opinion: By "I believe that", we sometimes simply express what we think is the case, what it would be best to do in the current situation etc. This usage of "belief" is neutral to having knowledge or not (if it turns out later that one's opinion was true, then we may sometimes retrospectively say that the belief in question amounted to knowledge). Believing in this second sense neither implies nor excludes knowledge. However, a belief in this sense is usually based on reasons or evidence.

c) Belief as knowledge–excluding epistemic status: This is the sense in which "belief/to believe" appears in the proverbs cited above. The one who believes–that–p in this sense does not know, and if he comes to knowledge about p, his belief–that–p (in the latter sense) ends. However, a belief–that–p in the *first* sense (a)) remains as a part of this newly–gained knowledge.

1.2 *Aquinas on Faith and Knowledge:* Aquinas does not explicitly carry out the conceptual analyses which we just briefly sketched, but his solution obviously presupposes their result. He says that it is possible that for some important propositions p (the so–called *praeambula fidei*) one person accepts them in the mode of faith only, whereas another accepts them also in the mode of demonstrable knowledge. Consequently, faith in this sense cannot be knowledge–excluding. The classical cases of a *praeambulum fidei* are the

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6   It would be interesting (from the point of view of historical linguistics) to trace the possible influence which biblical texts like the abovementioned Heb. 11: 1 had on these semantic features of the contemporary languages.

7   Partially following R. Chisholm, Epistemic Terms, in: *Perceiving*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1957, 15–21.

beliefs about God's existence and about his most important properties (like nontemporality, nonspatiality etc.): They can in principle be philosophically demonstrated, but it is not a necessary condition of religious belief that the believer has any interest, or even understanding, of such demonstrations. What for the philosopher is matter of academic knowledge can be held by the believer as an object of faith. Aquinas clearly invokes this principle in his *Reply to Objection 1. 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; for faith presupposes natural knowledge, even as grace presupposes nature, and perfection supposes something that can be perfected. Nevertheless, there is nothing to prevent a man, who cannot grasp a proof, accepting, as a matter of faith, something which in itself is capable of being scientifically known and demonstrated.*

1.3 *A first lesson: Philosophical theology as a second–order project of reflection:* The foregoing argument has an important consequence for the status of philosophical theology as a whole. Philosophical theology is not meant as a substitute for personal faith. The "simple" believer who accepts God's existence as a matter of faith alone can well be within her epistemic rights in doing so. It is not necessary for her to go into philosophical investigations first, and then adjust her religious beliefs as a result of her philosophical reflection. However, *sometimes* religious believers are in situations where a reflective ascertaining about the rationality of their religious beliefs would be helpful: situations of doubt, contradiction, religious crisis, simple discussion–situations in confrontation with other world–views.[8] In such situations, it may be particularly necessary to clarify the relationship between one's religious and non–religious beliefs. Aquinas' demonstrations — as indicated here in the *corpus articuli* of S. Th. I. q. 2, a. 2 and more elaborately in the subsequent "five ways" of demonstrating God's existence (S. Th. I. q. 2, a. 3) — offer exactly this: Aquinas clarifies how our talk about God relates to our talk about inner–worldly matters, e. g. movement, cause and effect, necessity and possibility, degrees of properties, order and design, etc.

Traditionally, especially in the scholastic period, the task of philosophical theology was seen in this modest, reflective, second–order function. It was not meant as a substitute for personal faith, nor as a tool to convince non–believers or heretics. In the first centuries of modernity, especially in the context of the rationalist ontologies and the projects of a "physico–theology" in the 17th and 18th century, philosophical theology confronted different expecta-

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8   For a detailed analysis of the structures of dialogues between different world–views see Otto Muck, *Rationalität und Weltanschauung. Philosophische Untersuchungen*. Innsbruck — Wien: Tyrolia 1999, especially part I.

tions. The traditional arguments for God's existence were loaded with a burden they were originally not meant for: they were now expected to be a basis for a sort of intersubjectively demonstrable theistic–world view as a whole, and consequently the rationality of religious beliefs was widely seen as dependent on the availability of good philosophical arguments for God's existence. This view still seems to be widespread, and together with the general suspicion under which philosophical theology has come especially since Kant's criticism, it is the background for a certain reciprocal skepticism: religious believers and theologians, for whom God's existence seems sure for other reasons, tend to be skeptical about philosophical theology. Conversely, philosophers who are familiar with Kant's criticism of metaphysics and philosophical theology as sciences tend to be skeptical about religious faith. In such a situation, philosophy of religion (or at least a significant stream within it) has tended to link the rationality of faith with the availability of philosophical arguments for God's existence. However, a careful reading of Aquinas shows that this linkage is not a necessary one and that the spontaneous religious certainty of the "normal" believer is not to be confused with the reflective argumentation characteristic of the (philosophical) project expressed by the tag *fides quaerens intellectum*. In our days, it is (among others) Alvin Plantinga and the other exponents of the so–called "Reformed Epistemology"[9] who have criticised this linkage. All due criticism of this position[10] notwithstanding, it has the merit of having restated this important distinction with impressive power.

2. *Can we demonstrate God's existence without having a definition of his essence?* The second objection discussed by Aquinas has to do with the logical matters discussed above. Even if it is admitted that demonstrations of God's existence are not epistemic syllogisms in the strict sense (see above ch. II), there is still one problem left: to construct any syllogisms at all yielding a consequence like "God exists" at all, we need a middle–term which refers to God's essence. But we do not fully know God's essence, as was seen, e. g., in the preceding article S. Th. I, q. 2, a. 1 where Aquinas had stated the non–self–evidence of God's existence and criticised Anselm's argument). Here is Aquinas' text: *Objection 2. Further, the essence is the middle term of demonstration (medium demonstrationis). But we cannot know in what God's essence consists, but solely in what it does not consist; as Damascene says (De Fide Orth. i, 4). Therefore we cannot demonstrate that God exists.* However, in the

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9   See the most recent volume by A. Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*. New York — Oxford: Oxford University Press 2000.

10   See my *Bemerkungen zur neueren "Christlichen Philosophie" in Nordamerika*, in: Theologie und Philosophie 73 (1998), 405–414.

case of demonstrations–that, especially demonstrations of the existence of an entity, the principle invoked here does not apply, Aquinas makes clear in his *Reply to Objection 2. When the existence of a cause is demonstrated from an effect, this effect takes the place of the definition of the cause in proof of the cause's existence. This is especially the case in regard to God, because, in order to prove the existence of anything, it is necessary to accept as a middle term the meaning of the word* [*accipere pro medio quid significet nomen*]*, and not its essence, for the question of its essence follows on the question of its existence. Now the names given to God are derived from His effects; consequently, in demonstrating the existence of God from His effects, we may take for the middle term the meaning of the word God'* [*accipere possumus pro medio quid significet hoc nomen Deus*].

2.1 *Some prominent mistranslations:* Objection 2 and Aquinas' reply to it have been subject to a number of astonishing mistranslations. E. g., two leading and still widespread German translations[11] mistranslate "medium" or "medium demonstrationis" as "Beweismittel" or "Mittel im Beweis", which means "evidence" (where "middle–term" would be the correct translation)! The result in both cases is an unnecessary obscure German translation of a clear and straightforward Latin text.

Our English translation also contains what is at least a doubtful passage: *to accept as a middle term the meaning of the word* as a translation for *accipere pro medio quid significet nomen* is misleading. In defence of the translators, however, it must be admitted that the things are not as simple here as in the the "middle–term"–case above. But this leads us right into the center of the problem.

2.2 *On meaning and reference in existence–demonstrations:* As we saw, Aquinas holds that demonstrations for God's existence are demonstrations–that starting from the effects, and that such demonstrations, although syllogistic in form, are not strict epistemic syllogisms. Hence, it is not necessary to have a concept of the essence of God in order to establish the demonstrations, and a good part of the problem raised in objection 2 loses its point. However, there is one logical problem left: to establish any syllogism at all, a suitable middle–term is required. But demonstrations–that of the existence of entities have a general problem here: Traditionally, questions for the essence of an entity have no point before the question of the existence of this entity is answered.

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11   Thomas v. Aquin, *Gottes Dasein und Wesen* (Die deutsche Thomas–Ausgabe. Deutsch–lateinische Ausgabe der Summa Theologica Bd. 1. Salzburg: Pustet 1933); Thomas von Aquino, *Summe der Theologie.* Zusammengefaßt, eingeführt und erläutert von J. Bernhart, Bd. I. Stuttgart: Kröner 19853.

Within demonstrations of existence, however, we must talk in one way or the other about the entities whose existence is to be demonstrated. And a special problem with regard to God further complicates the situation: according to the tradition of "negative theology", there can only be negative assertions about God's essence.

Aquinas solves the problem roughly in the following way: to demonstrate the existence of an entity, especially from its effects, it is not necessary to have an essential definition of this entity right from the beginning. It is enough to have a minimal knowledge about this entity which is based on its effects; this knowledge needs only to be sufficient for establishing the reference of the terms in question. A similar situation holds e. g. in criminal investigations or particle physics, wherever demonstrations of existence, e. g. in regard of a criminal syndicate or a newly postulated particle, are carried out. In these cases, we typically talk about the things in questions as "the x (whatever properties else it may have!), which is the cause for the data... and ...". There, the description of the thing is taken from its effects (e. g., experiential data or criminal actions at different places and times). The description needs only to be sufficiently rich to establish reference to a certain thing (whatever it may be); it is not required that the essence of the thing is completely covered by it. This seems to be what Aquinas means when he says that in the course of the demonstration we can *accipere pro medio quid significet hoc nomen Deus*: for the sake to get a middle–term in the demonstration, a minimal description of what "God" means will suffice, and this description will be taken from his effects, e. g. "the x which moves, but which is not moved by anything else".

To come back to the translation problems mentioned in section 2. 1: In terms of contemporary philosophy of language, we would reconstruct this requirement as follows: the *meaning* of the word "God" must be circumscribed sufficiently clear to achieve a definite description whose *reference* can be expected not to be empty. The term *significatio* in medieval philosophy of language (and the related terms like *suppositio*) cannot simply be mapped onto the contemporary terminology, but a translation as *meaning* is at least ambiguous:[12] the "meaning of the word God'" does not here have a *wide* sense, and knowledge of this meaning does not imply knowledge of God's essence;

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12   It has to be admitted that our translation goes back to 1920, and hence antedates, if only shortly, the rise of twentieth–century philosophy of language. But there is no need for modern terminology of meaning and reference in order to point up the ambiguity here. See e. g. the 1933 German translation which very liberally translates *accipere pro medio quid significet nomen, non autem quod quid est* as "so kann der Beweis nicht vom Wesensbegriff der Sache, sondern immer nur von der Nominaldefinition [d. h. von der Sachbezeichnung] ausgehen". From the philological standpoint, *nominal definition* [*i. e. reference to the thing*] for *quod significet nomen* is extremely liberal as a translation; philosophically, it seems quite appropriate.

rather, the phrase here indicates a *minimal* meaning which is taken from the effects and which secures the reference of the terms involved.[13]

2.3 *A second lesson: The double function of the arguments for God's existence:* The foregoing remarks might seem logical hair–splittings at first glance, but they point up a crucially important feature of traditional philosophical theology. The classical arguments, e. g. Aquinas' "Five Ways", do not start with the exposition of a definition of God. They do not even end with a clear definition of God or an assertion like "hence, God exists". These arguments start with some observations about general features of our world of experience (movement, causation etc.), proceed via a sort of metaphysical analysis of those features to an existence assertion like "Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other"; and they end up in very similar, characteristic clauses: "and this everyone understands to be God'". In effect, each of these arguments is not only an argument for the existence of an ultimate ground of reality, it also yields a contribution to the clarification of God's properties: God is assumed to be the ultimate ground for the features initially mentioned, and as such he cannot have those features himself (otherwise he would not be the ultimate ground, but an effect of another one):

	feature of the world	**feature of the ultimate ground**
1st way	Movement	mover, but not moved by something else
2nd way	Causation	cause, but not caused by something else
3rd way	contingent facts	necessary ground of all contingent facts
4th way	degrees of properties like goodness	instantiation of the highest degree of those properties
5th way	non–conscious target–orientated processes	conscious designer of those processes

13 This is further elaborated in the 3rd objection and the reply to it: *Objection 3. Further, if the existence of God were demonstrated, this could only be from His effects. But His effects are not proportionate to Him, since He is infinite and His effects are finite; and between the finite and infinite there is no proportion. Therefore, since a cause cannot be demonstrated by an effect not proportionate to it, it seems that the existence of God cannot be demonstrated.* — *Reply to Objection 3. From effects not proportionate to the cause no perfect knowledge of that cause can be obtained. Yet from every effect the existence of the cause can be clearly demonstrated, and so we can demonstrate the existence of God from His effects; though from them we cannot perfectly know God as He is in His essence.* — It may be noted that objections like this one may have religious and philosophical reasons (similar to objection 1); Aquinas stresses the philosophical line.

As we saw, the last step of each "way" or argument is to identify the assumed ultimate ground (with its peculiar features) and the "God" of the monotheistic religions: "and this everyone understands to be God'". The identification is done in this apparently modest way for the reason discussed above: we cannot presuppose an essential definition of God, and hence we cannot proceed to an identification clause like "being the unmoved mover belongs to the essence of God, hence God exists" or the like.[14] Aquinas does not elaborate the reasons for this identification, but one could easily supply reasons for it: what the metaphysician says about the features of the ultimate ground (unmoved mover, uncaused cause, etc.) has striking similarities with what monotheistic believers say about God (transcendental, personal, perfect, creator, etc.).

A side–effect of this way of putting things is that the demonstrations of God's existence serve another task: they can be seen as procedures introducing the term "God" (in the precise meaning established during the demonstrations, other existent meanings notwithstanding) into the scientific language of theology.[15]

2.4 *A third lesson: The sources of philosophical theology:* This quite distinctive style identification illustrates the specific status that the style of philosophical theology adopted by Aquinas and his followers has: it is situated, as we would say from a modern perspective, in the overlapping region between metaphysics and philosophy of religion, and it rests on contributions from both disciplines. The necessary contribution from the side of philosophy of religion is to propose something like a heuristic "core concept" of God as the one part of the identification clause. The primary way towards such a core concept are phenomenological analyses of religion, investigations about what actual believers ascribe to God. The contribution of metaphysics to philosophical the-

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14 Aquinas' way of procedure (his peculiar connection of existence–demonstration and property–clarification) is not the only thinkable one. For an alternative strategy, see e. g. Richard Swinburne's *The Existence of God* (2nd, revised edition). Oxford: Blackwell 1991: Swinburne presupposes a definition of God right from the beginning. This definition is a result of his 1977 book *The Coherence of Theism*. Methodologically, this latter book proceeds from a phenomenology of religious claims about God and reduces these claims to a logically consistent conception of God. Afterwards, in *The Existence of God*, a cumulative–case argument for the existence of a so–defined entity are developed (for some problems with this argument, see my *An Overlooked Consequence of Swinburne's Probabilistic Theology*, in: Disputatio philosophica 1 (1999), 90–100). In comparison with Swinburne, Aquinas' account of the relation between the phenomenology of religion and metaphysical claims seems more attractive, since the relation to questions of general metaphysics are laid open more clearly.

15 See G. Siegwart, *"Et hoc dicimus Deum". Eine definitionstheoretische Betrachtung zu SthIq2a3*, in: Ricken (see footnote 4), 85–108.

ology is to reconcile those religious claims with our metaphysical ambitions, and this is done via the arguments for God's existence. Both contributions are indispensable for a satisfactory philosophical theology. Without one foot in the philosophy of religion, philosophical theology is in danger of slipping into a pure theoretical speculation about the existence of some extravagant inhabitant of the "ontological zoo". Conversely, without one foot in metaphysics, philosophical theology would remain a purely phenomenological discipline and would leave us without an answer to the question of the theoretical rationality of religious beliefs.

Aquinas' way of combining the approach of philosophy of religion with metaphysical questions has a lot to recommend itself, for philosophers as well as for theologians: In this account, God does not just appear as an odd, additional entity at the ends of our ontology; rather, Aquinas grounds the claims made about God within a religious world–view and clarifies how the conception of God functions within such a world–view. Typically,

religious believers understand "God" as an ultimate explanation, and Aquinas is offering philosophical arguments which clarify this attitude. In particular, he is clarifying how our talk about "God" can relate to other speculations about some fundamental questions concerning our world–picture, e. g. the nature of movement, causation and existence. In virtue of that, Aquinas' approach may serve to facilitate discussions between different world–views. Since God's nature and existence is not treated as an isolated topic, but in connection with facts accessible to anybody (at least in principle), and since the arguments for God's existence do not require the acceptance of a definition of "God" right from the beginning, the discussion is accessible to anybody, be they of a religious, non–religious or even anti–religious standpoint. Moreover, ultimate explanations do not appear in religious world–views only; the function of an ultimate explanation, as a stopping–point of a all meaningful questioning, can be fulfilled not only by a conception of God, but also by other conceptions which display some structural similarities with conceptions of God: e. g., nature or the whole universe can be regarded as a huge organism–like system in which our life is somehow embedded, or as a continous process (towards progress or decline, or as a perennial repetition) which renders a sort of sense to the life of the singular person, and much more. Aquinas' way of introducing "God" may stimulate dialogue between different world–views: e. g., it may help the non–believer to understand what Christians and other theists mean by "God", and it may help believers (who are typically socialized into a religious tradition without reflections on the philosophical and metaphysical commitments it implies)) to purify their conception of God especially in its relations to other fields of rational inquiry.

IV. *Conclusion*

Of course, a philosophical theology "for today" cannot simply consist in repeating Aquinas' theses and arguments. In particular, it has to take into account the results of modern philosophy of language, e. g. about the various uses of language, the special "convictional" and "performative" character of religious speech in comparison to other forms of speech, etc. However, authors like Ian Ramsey[16] and Otto Muck[17] have shown that the bridge is not that difficult to gap, since Aquinas and other medieval authors developed some parallel points and displayed similar interests (see, e. g. S. Th. I, qq. 12 and 13). It has been the task of this article to show that Aquinas' discussions arguments for and against the demonstrability of God's existence could have a lot to offer for contemporary discussions about the status and methods of philosophical theology. The point could also have been illustrated from other discussions in Aquinas: e. g., the two objections discussed in S. Th. I, q. 2, a. 3 briefly raise the problem of evil and the challenge of naturalism[18] as an alternative world–view. This article has also shown a more general point about Aquinas' method: The "objection & reply" — passages are not be neglected, as if it were only Aquinas' solution which mattered (the remark in footnote 5 notwithstanding!). They display not only the rooting of scholastic texts in educational situations — they also remind us of the primary source of philosophical insight: namely, lively and sincere discussion arising from a passion for clarity.[19]

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16   *Christian discourse: Some logical explorations*. London — New York: Oxford University Press 1965.

17   Op. cit. (see footnote 8 above), especially *Zur Logik der Rede von Gott* and the other chapters of part I.

18   For a classification of modern "naturalisms", a historical survey and some suggestions for a fruitful discussion see my *Naturalisierungsprogramme und ihre methodologischen Grenzen*, in: J. Quitterer / E. Runggaldier (eds.), Der neue Naturalismus — Eine Herausforderung an das christliche Menschenbild. Stuttgart — Berlin — Köln: Kohlhammer 1999, 30–76.

19   I wish to thank Philip Endean S. J. for a number of helpful comments and linguistic corrections.