

AQUINAS. By Eleonore Stump. London and New York: Routledge, 2003. Pp. xx + 611. Hard Cover \$124.95, ISBN 041502960.

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Eleonore Stump has for many years been an important contributor not only to scholarship in medieval philosophy but also to discussions of free will and moral responsibility, divine eternity and simplicity, the problem of evil, and other topics of contemporary interest. And I use the word 'discussions' advisedly, since Stump is justly known not merely for her published work but also for her unstinting contributions as a partner in philosophical dialogue. Her volume on Aquinas for Routledge's *Arguments of the Philosophers* reflects this level of philosophical engagement to an unusual degree, as Stump develops earlier work in light of objections and suggestions made by others both in print and in conversation. Of course all philosophers address objections raised by others, but Stump has been unusually energetic in discussing her own work and that of others laboring in the same fields — and some of her earlier articles, including some done in collaboration with Norman Kretzmann, have achieved the status of classics and have accordingly attracted more than the usual amount of critical attention. As a consequence of Stump's generous engagement with critics, the developments of earlier work that we find in *Aquinas* are exceptionally rich and nuanced, and Aquinas's views are expounded and defended with outstanding acumen.

After an introduction that gives an overview of Aquinas's life and thought, *Aquinas* is divided into four parts. Part I, "The ultimate foundation of reality," begins with a general

account of Aquinas's metaphysics and then turns to the metaphysics of goodness (which serves as Aquinas's metaethics) and metaphysical issues involving divine simplicity, eternity, and omniscience. Part II, "The nature of human beings," considers the relationship between soul and body, the nature of human knowledge and the mechanisms by which it is attained, and the nature of freedom. In Part III, "The nature of human excellence," Stump devotes a chapter each to a representative moral, intellectual, and theological virtue (justice, wisdom, and faith, respectively) before examining the relationship between grace and free will. In Part IV, "God's relationship to human beings," she discusses the metaphysics of the Incarnation, the Atonement, and Aquinas's account of providence, in which he attends to what we think of as the problem of evil.

At nearly five hundred pages, excluding endnotes, *Aquinas* is so full of interesting material that I will not even attempt to cover all of it. I will instead focus on two chapters that offer particularly interesting examples of the way in which Stump carries out the "explicit purpose" of this book, which is "to explicate the views of Aquinas with reasonable historical accuracy and to bring them into dialogue with the corresponding discussions in contemporary philosophy" (ix). Consider first the opening chapter of Part I, which offers an introduction to Aquinas's metaphysics. It would be difficult to overestimate the utility of this chapter for the non-specialist readers who are an important part of the intended audience for this book. As Stump explains, much of Aquinas's work in metaphysics is carried on using Latin terms whose usual English translations also figure in contemporary metaphysics, but with very different meanings. Without an introduction of the sort Stump provides here, readers who are primarily

conversant with contemporary metaphysics are bound to misunderstand Aquinas at every turn, with the result that some of his most compelling arguments and views will be written off as sheer nonsense. (This is a point to which Stump must recur, most notably in the chapter on divine simplicity, a doctrine that looks like obvious nonsense if the key terms in its characteristic claims are interpreted in their usual present-day senses.) By beginning with an introduction to Aquinas's metaphysics, Stump helps ensure that the remainder of her exposition will speak clearly to readers who are not already well-entrenched within a Thomist conceptual landscape.

The chapter lays out those parts of Aquinas's metaphysics that make up what Stump calls his "theory of things": his account of substances, artifacts, and "at least some of the parts of which substances are constituted" (35). Most of the chapter should be smooth sailing for a contemporary reader, as she lays out the distinctions between matter and form, substantial and accidental forms, and substances and artifacts. It will come as a surprise to many that on the common medieval view, which Aquinas accepts, the Law of the Indiscernibility of Identicals (LII) is obviously false, but Stump explains Aquinas's account of individuation and identity in ways that ought to make the denial of LII at least plausible.

Matters begin to get trickier when Stump turns to issues of mereology. She begins by noting a conclusion that can be derived from the metaphysical claims she has already discussed, namely, that "constitution is not identity" (50). Now in contemporary metaphysical discussion, the slogan "constitution is not identity" is generally used to allow conceptual space for co-location. Consider a standard example: a statue and the lump of stuff that constitutes the

statue. One says that constitution is not identity in order to allow that we have two objects, a statue and a lump, occupying exactly the same location. That they are two, the constitution-is-not-identity crowd tells us, is evident from their differing persistence conditions: flatten the statue, and we still have a lump, but we no longer have a statue. Given that this is the usual sense of “constitution is not identity” in contemporary discussion, some readers will perhaps be surprised when they find Stump claiming (correctly) that Aquinas denies the possibility of co-location (55). But the surprise will be dispelled by the realization that what Aquinas in fact denies is co-location of *material supposits*. That is, there cannot be “two whole material substances in the same place at the same time” (55); no doubt the statue and the lump are co-located, but either the form of the statue does not count as a substantial form or the form of the lump does not count as a substantial form. (In fact, neither will count as a substantial form; the statue-shape and the lump-shape are both accidental forms. The only substantial form in this story is the form of the stuff — say, bronze — out of which both the lump and the statue are made.) The friends of co-location have little reason to be disheartened by Aquinas’s carefully qualified denial.

In any event, it appears that for Stump the claim that constitution is not identity is associated not with the possibility of co-location, but with the denial of mereological essentialism. (Mereological essentialism [hereafter ME] is the view that composite objects have their parts essentially.) She says, for example, that “because constitution is not identity for Aquinas, it is possible for him to suppose that a supposit [i.e., a particular substance] survives the loss of some of its constituents, provided that the remaining constituents can exist on their

own and are sufficient for the existence of the supposit" (51-52). Now since what Stump is really interested in is the denial of ME, some readers might think she has introduced needless complications by exploring the claim that constitution is not identity. But there is a view that is not always clearly distinguished in the literature from the claim that constitution is identity, and this view does bear directly on ME. David Lewis argued in *Parts of Classes* for constitution as identity, according to which the (one) whole is identical with the (many) parts that constitute it. Now it has been persuasively argued (and, so far as I can tell, widely accepted) that composition as identity entails ME. So considerations about constitution and identity do after all bear on Stump's principal target here, which is the denial of ME. Yet it is not clear that they bear on *Aquinas's* denial of ME. For the argument from composition as identity to ME invokes LII; since Aquinas denies LII, the argument is not a worry for him anyway.

Stump uses the denial of ME in the service of an argument for the controversial claim that an individual human being continues to exist after the death of the body in virtue of the continued existence of her soul. On the interpretation she has been offering, the existence of a substantial form is sufficient for the existence of the thing of which it is the substantial form. Therefore, since the human soul is the substantial form of a human being, so long as the human soul exists, the human being exists. Yet the separated soul is not itself identical with that human being.

A number of scholars have raised objections to this interpretation, and Stump takes up the objections in the text and notes. I will not address her responses, but I do find one supporting argument that requires comment. She writes:

It is also worth noticing that if this interpretation were not correct . . . then there would be an incoherence in his position. That is because he could not hold such a view of a human being consistently with his view of the nature of change. On the Aristotelian understanding of change Aquinas inherits and accepts, a thing which gains or loses an accidental form undergoes change while remaining one and the same thing. Quantities, including quantity of matter, are accidents, however. So, on Aquinas's position, a human being who loses a quantity of matter, such as a hand or a leg, for instance, remains one and the same thing while undergoing change. If, however, constitution were identity for Aquinas, then a human being whose material constituents changed would cease to be the thing she was and become some other thing instead. In that case, contrary to Aquinas's position, the gain or loss of an accident such as quantity of matter would not be a change in a human being; it would be the destruction of one thing and the generation of another. The fact that Aquinas holds the view of change he does, then, supports the interpretation I have been arguing for here. (53-54)

Now it is true that, by definition, one and the same thing persists through accidental change; and it is also correct that change in quantity is accidental change. But these two claims do not entail that *any* amount of change in quantity in a thing is consistent with a thing's persisting. If I begin whittling on a tree, it does not cease to exist when I have lopped off one branch; but at some point I will have whittled it down to a dead thing. The changes in quantity will eventually *bring about* a substantial change, even though no change in quantity ever *amounts to* a substantial change. So these considerations drawn from Aquinas's understanding of change are not sufficient to show that a human being can survive the drastic sort of quantitative change that occurs when the soul is separated from matter altogether. Aquinas needs (and offers) other arguments that the human soul, unlike other substantial forms, persists even in the absence of any matter for it to inform. Stump takes up these arguments in chapter 6, "Forms and Bodies." Yet in that chapter Stump argues that the human being does *not* in fact survive the death of the body: "Since Aquinas thinks of a human being as a composite of matter and soul and since he recognizes that dead human bodies decay, he does in fact believe that a human being falls apart

at death. The disembodied soul which persists is not the complete human being who was the composite but only a part of that human being" (211). These statements seem hard to square with the claim in chapter 1 that the continued existence of the human soul is sufficient for the continued existence of the human being, and they are definitely at odds with the argument about quantitative change on which I commented above.

The second chapter I wish to consider in detail contains Stump's discussion of Aquinas's account of justice, which she situates firmly within a contemporary context. She first introduces Annette Baier's distinction between an ethics of care and ethics of justice. According to Baier, Aquinas offers a "very legalistic moral theory" (310), one that does "little to protect the young or the dying or the starving or any of the relatively powerless against neglect, or to ensure an education that will form persons to be *capable* of conforming to an ethics of care and responsibility" (309). (The first expression quoted is Baier's description of Aquinas in particular; the second is a description of problems endemic to ethics of justice in general.) Moving from ethics proper to political theory, Stump then turns to Thomas Nagel, who makes what she takes to be an analogous distinction between the impersonal standpoint, which "produces . . . a powerful demand for universal impartiality and equality," and the personal standpoint, which "gives rise to individualistic motives and requirements which present obstacles to the pursuit and realization of such ideals" (312). Nagel says that there is no political ideal (let alone any actual political arrangement) that manages to combine the demands of both standpoints in an acceptable way. Stump's aim is to show that both Baier and Nagel have fallen prey to false dichotomies, which Aquinas exposes. Aquinas's account of justice, she

argues, constitutes a “political ideal in which care and justice, the personal and the impersonal standpoints, are combined not only with regard to economic goods but also with regard to other goods a society can and should provide” (313).

Aquinas’s account of commutative justice plays an important role in this argument. The rules of commutative justice govern transactions (whether economic transactions or interactions more broadly) between individuals within a state. Commutative justice requires that parties to the transaction “have the same” after the transaction as they did before. If I buy from you an item worth \$40 but give you only \$30 in exchange, I have committed an injustice, because I am in a better position and you are in a worse position than before the exchange took place. Indeed, if I sell you an item for \$30 that we both think at the time is worth \$30 but turns out to be worth \$300, you owe me restitution when the greater value of the item comes to light. (Adoption of Aquinas’s standards for commutative justice would absolutely ruin the fun of *Antiques Roadshow*.) Analogously, in non-economic exchanges, I do you an injustice if I take away your good name or inflict an injury on you, because I gain in status or power at your expense.

In this way commutative justice not only supports norms of non-maleficence but also, as Stump shows quite effectively, requires a high degree of economic equality. Aquinas argues that it is “a mortal sin to acquire or keep more property than is necessary to sustain one in one’s condition in life” (322) and holds that almsgiving is morally obligatory. But almsgiving seems to be in tension precisely with commutative justice. If I give \$100 to someone in need, he is \$100 better off and I am \$100 worse off than before the exchange: a paradigm case of commutative

injustice, it would seem. Stump's ingenious solution to this problem is to argue that, contrary to appearances, such transactions are regulated not by commutative justice but by distributive justice, which governs the relationship between an individual and the state as a whole. In giving \$100 to a poor person I am distributing to him his proper share of the common goods of society. That is, I am acting as an agent of the state — or better yet, as an agent of God, since all goods really belong to God (325).

Almsgiving is much broader for Aquinas than giving money. It includes caring for the material and spiritual well-being of others in a variety of ways. That such almsgiving is obligatory — willful failure to perform it is mortally sinful — is enough to show that Aquinas's ethics of justice escapes the sort of censure Annette Baier made in the passage quoted above. Addressing the worries raised by Thomas Nagel, however, proves more difficult. As Stump puts the problem, it might seem that "Aquinas demands from individuals an unreasonable concern for others or for the welfare of the community. Too much emphasis is put on the impersonal standpoint, one might think, and not enough room is left for a person's own projects and preferences" (335-6). I do not here have the space to give adequate attention to Stump's interesting defense of Aquinas on this point, but two aspects of her defense bear noting. The first is her discussion of the requirement that people rebuke those engaged in wrongdoing. She notes that in a bad community, such "fraternal correction" (as Aquinas calls it) "can cost you your job, your standing in the community, your children, your life" (336). Can there really be a moral obligation to "wreck one's life for the good of the community"? Her answer is that in a really bad community, such as Nazi Germany, those who do not dissent

cannot really succeed in flourishing. We properly have contempt for people like Albert Speer, who was allowed to pursue his own private aims because he was willing to placate Hitler; and we are not at all inclined to think that Dietrich Bonhoeffer “wrecked his life,” even though his resistance to Nazism brought him great suffering. I can certainly see the force of this argument as it applies to exceptionally evil societies, but it might need some revision when we are considering our duties in garden-variety fallen societies. Fraternal correction is not going to get people thrown in jail, but it might well make difficulties at work or in their social life. Why accept this cost, comparatively small though it is, when it is not genocide one is keeping silent about, but trivial slanders or minor-league fits of envy? It is not plausible to say that I cannot flourish in a society in which trivial slanders and minor-league fits of envy go unrebuked.

Stump also notes that Aquinas does not countenance the use of coercion to ensure that individuals live up to the heavy obligations to which they are subject according to his account of justice (334). But someone in the grip of Nagel’s worries might well object that if there are no political mechanisms for the enforcement of these obligations, Aquinas’s ideal does not count as a *political* ideal at all. It might well offer a *moral* vision in which both the common good and the projects of individuals are given their due weight, but it disclaims any interest in delineating the political, economic, and social institutions that would be necessary to realize and sustain a community in which that moral vision is given concrete form. Although this line of thinking is not in itself an objection to Aquinas’s account of justice, it might (with considerable development) be used to call into question Stump’s claim that Aquinas provides an acceptable political ideal of the sort that Nagel claimed we lack.

Indeed, there is an important line of argument that threatens to show that Aquinas is not here offering even a *moral* vision of the right sort. Stump acknowledges that Aquinas treats almsgiving under the heading of charity and not of justice, but she argues in an important footnote that “it is clear that in his view the general obligation to succor the poor is an obligation of justice, at least in the general sense of ‘justice’” (543, n. 87). The passages she cites here are instructive, but they arguably fall short of establishing the conclusion. For example, Stump cites *ST* 2a2ae 117.5 ad 3 as saying that “to give liberally to needy strangers belongs to justice,” but in the actual discussion of almsgiving Aquinas notes that almsgiving is connected with liberality only insofar as liberality removes the impediment to almsgiving that “arises from an excessive love of riches, which causes someone to be too grasping” (*ST* 2a2ae 32.1 ad 4). That is, almsgiving is an act of liberality only indirectly; strictly speaking, it is an act of charity. Similar points could be made about the other passages Stump cites. Now charity is a theological virtue infused by God, not acquired by one’s own activity; and God does not infuse it in everyone. So if indeed almsgiving issues from charity rather than from justice, the moral philosopher (as opposed to the theologian) cannot appeal to the duty of almsgiving as part of a case that Aquinas offers a moral vision that gives due weight to the goods emphasized in an ethics of care. A parallel argument would note that Aquinas understands fraternal correction not as generalized social “dissent” prompted by a zeal for justice, but as reproof of those to whom we are bound by charity. The word ‘fraternal’ or ‘brotherly’ is no accident: Aquinas is thinking of brothers and sisters in Christ, and particularly of one’s brothers in a religious order. If we do have some duty as moral watchdogs for society in general, it is not clear that Aquinas

recognizes it.

These criticisms illustrate the difficulties of Stump's avowed aim of combining historical accuracy with contemporary relevance. This aim, with which I enthusiastically concur, makes *Aquinas* a work of great interest to two different audiences; but it also subjects her work to two quite different sets of demands, and it is not clear that it is always possible to succeed by both sets of standards. The difficulty is particularly pronounced in ethics, since Aquinas's theological motivations determine the very structure of his account of the virtuous life. Few contemporary moral philosophers share those motivations, so in order to make Aquinas a participant in contemporary debates, one must often detach his accounts of specific virtues or moral rules from their theological context, as Stump has to relocate almsgiving and fraternal correction in order to bring Aquinas's account of justice into dialogue with Annette Baier and Thomas Nagel. The historically persnickety reader will object that the result may well be a view inspired by Aquinas, but it cannot be Aquinas's view.

If indeed Stump's stated aim is at least sometimes impossible to achieve, one could hardly fault her for failing occasionally to achieve it; but one might be tempted to think it was not a sensible aim to adopt in the first place. But the good that cannot always be done ought still to be done when it can be, and I cannot help seeing this twofold aim as a good one. If contemporary relevance really counted for nothing, as some historians of philosophy seem to believe, why not spend a lifetime preoccupied with such arcana as the eight daughters of lust? And if we do not work for historical accuracy, we will inevitably be hearing only the echoes of our own contemporaries and so depriving ourselves of what can be learned from past

philosophers. Eleonore Stump is both a discerning reader of Aquinas and a talented philosopher; the happy result of this confluence of talents is that *Aquinas* itself is perhaps the best defense of her twofold aim. Both historians of philosophy and contemporary philosophers across a wide range of areas of interest will find much in this book to challenge, to enlighten, and to provoke further reflection both on Aquinas himself and on the philosophical topics on which he had so much of enduring value to say.¹

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