THE THOMIST

1939

THE SPECULATIVE QUARTERLY OF ST. JOSEPH S PROVINCE

The Thomist is a Dominican venture by the Fathers of St. Joseph’s Province. It is launched on the postulate that Dominicans have something very special to offer this twentieth century world of ours, something, indeed, that no other group, as a group, is as well equipped to offer.

It is because of this fact that the overcrowded condition of the magazine field in America can be faced without serious trepidation for this unique and precious contribution we have to make removes this new venture from the hazards of competition. This Dominican venture is not entering the overcrowded portion of the magazine field; it cultivates a part of that field yet untouched by any review published in English.

THE DOMINICAN CONTRIBUTION

If this contribution is to be made by Dominicans precisely as Dominicans, it is not to be restricted to a few highly trained individuals, specialists in some particular field. It must be a contribution that can be made by every Dominican by reason of his Dominican training. The fundamental postulate of this venture then is that our training has given us something that our world needs badly. Its guarantee of success lies in the vital apostolicity of the Dominican vocation, in the certitude that having something necessary to men and women of our age, nothing can hold us back from sharing it. The vital apostolicity of our Dominican vocation needs no argumentation or explanation. The fact of the heritage that is ours by reason of our training is hardly less sure,

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less clear. For it is a fact easily established that our course in the philosophy and theology of St. Thomas has given us a double equipment of inestimable value. It has given us, first of all, a unified and comprehensive knowledge of Thomistic principles. And, secondly, it has given us an intimate familiarity with the text and the thought of St. Thomas so great that that thought has seeped into the marrow of our bones. In fact so much a part of us has this Thomistic point of view become that we take it for granted as something obvious, easy, as unnoteworthy as our breathing; and so we frequently underestimate its value. This is the common possession of Dominicans upon which The Thomist bases its chances for apostolic life. It is something which no other group, as a group, possesses so fully. The articles of The Thomist will be no more than the use of this common possession.

WHAT CAN WE DO WITH OUR PRINCIPLES?

The use of this common heritage of ours does not call for long training or further specialization. We are already prepared; for this we are fully equipped; into this
work we can step without apology or fear for here we are at home. We already have all the material necessary; what is further needed might be called "mental dexterity" or, in more ponderous language, a simple methodology. We are in somewhat the same position as the parent of a sturdy but lazy boy; the parent has only to discover how to make the boy work and then results worthy of his splendid physique are assured. We have only to discover how to make our principles work and results worthy of the depth and grandeur of those principles are assured. Our Dominican task then is to put our principles to work. How can it be done?

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A PRINCIPLE AT WORK

Let us try to put a principle to work and see just what it can do when pressed. To make the task a fair test, let us take a thoroughly abstract principle which, to the casual observer, is completely divorced from ordinary life, such a principle as: "The end is the beginning." We all know that this simply means that action does not start unless a goal is in a mind.

1. If we look over the shoulder of this principle to other higher principles we can see its inviolable connection with the principle of finality--"every agent acts for an end," From this it is only a step to the principle of sufficient reason and of causality; finally another step takes us to the principle of contradiction. In other words we know we are on the solid ground furnished by the first principles of thought and being; we have penetrated to the roots of the certitude of this principle.

2. Looking around from the heights of certitude of this principle we can see: a) That every activity is a statement of intelligence, never a substitute for it as the naturalists would have us believe.

b) The explanation of man's unique position in the world as the sole possessor of a mind and so the sole master of his actions. c) The radical nature of the attack on the humanity of man by anti-intellectualistic philosophies.

3. Bringing this principle down into the details of human life: a) We have the tragic explanation of boredom, the state of the goal-less man.

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b) The secret of the intense activity of Christian life on earth and the life of the saints in heaven.

c) The futile exhaustion of the race after goals that are not goals.

d) The ultimate meaning of that activity which is life.

e) The meaninglessness of existence shorn of personal goals, such as is held out to men by humanitarianism, communism and naturalism.

A SITUATION AT WORK
The foregoing is a process of descent from a principle; now let us take it the other way around, arising from a human situation to the satisfying solution offered by a principle. Let us imagine ourselves in the position of a dramatic critic who is yawning his way through another poor play. He recalls, in disgust, that he has seen nothing but poor plays in months and months; in fact he cannot recall when he last saw a good play. He is quite convinced that conflict is the essence of drama; and he subscribes with glib superficiality to the axiom that the drama mirrors its age.

Suppose that instead of merely venting his spleen on just another author, he sat down and thought over the situation a moment, made some little search for the principles involved, what would he find?

a) If conflict is the essence of drama and drama mirrors his age, then it is evident that an age which consistently produces tepid drama is an age of tepid conflict, an age in which men find little worth fighting about.

b) An age that produces consistently worthless plays is an age that finds nothing worth fighting about at all.

c) An age that produces only base plays is an age that considers only the base worthy of man's conflict.

d) Behind these obvious conclusions he would see the principle: the evaluation of the ends or goals of man is the measure of conflict and conflict is the measure of the value men put on their goals. 1) Immediately boredom is stripped of its sophistication and left shivering in its naked cowardice. 2) Pacificism is stated in blunt terms: nothing is comparable to a whole skin. Behind the veil of pseudo-spiritual values which hides the face of pacifism is seen the disgusting materialism that marks it as a blood relation of ruthless war-mongering. Both are plainly inhuman. 3) Conflict is seen clearly as the clash of appetites seeking a goal. The essence of aggressive war lies in the search for a goal that cannot be shared; the inviolability of peace, in the search for the indivisible goal that can be shared by all. 4) Where men are engaged only in mass conflicts individual goals have ceased to exist; and this makes clear the sterility of mass-philosophies for the individual. 5) The contradiction of the inhuman substitution of activity for intelligence becomes evident. For no activity starts unless a goal is first in a mind. 6) The end is the beginning.

WHAT HAS BEEN DONE?

What have we done with this small portion of our common heritage? Chesterton would say that we have "lifted ourselves up on the starry ladder of light logic and swift imagination"; or we have "thought on three planes at once, comparing a lower with a higher thing and yet that higher with a higher still." For we have compared a principle with a higher principle and again with its lower consequences; or, starting with the situation, we have compared it with a higher principle and that principle with a still higher one. We have made some "far-flung comparisons" that suggest something very vast, even that ontological plenitude where the mind of man is so much at home even though it can never plumb the uttermost depths. More simply,
we have put our principles to work with the help of imagination. Or, to state the thing in concrete terms, we have speculated in the truest sense of the term, that is we have thought to or from a principle, deepening our insight of that principle and seeing its broad significance for human living. In a word, we have done some original thinking.

Two Obstacles to Success

So *The Thomist* wants speculation and original thought, does it? The first as dry as dust and the second the product of genius; what an impossible dream! And the waste-basket opens its great mouth to devour another bit of futile scribbling. Here precisely lies the greatest danger to the success of *The Thomist*: the danger that our conviction of the abstruse inutility of speculation and our awesome fear of original thought will bring about a complete paralysis. But is speculation dry, dusty, useless?

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Is original thought restricted to genius? Before we begin to chant the requiem let's take a closer look at both of them. **SPECULATION**

It is true that the interest of *The Thomist* lies in the solution of speculative questions in a speculative manner, i.e. by original thought. But *The Thomist* is not interested in dry, dusty speculation, in the reverent resurrection of questions long since threshed out. It is not interested even in the scholarly labors of the critical expert correcting a text or collating passages of some one else's works; but strictly in speculation in the sense of original philosophical and theological thought.

Because philosophy and theology are not sciences dealing with fields proper to any one age, such questions will be vital to this age; because philosophy and theology deal with the ultimates of supreme interest to men and of extreme importance to human living, such questions have an immediate and profound human interest, Indeed they are the questions behind the controversies that engage the minds of men today; until that significance for human living is seen a speculative question has not been fully grasped. (Cf. p. 3-5).

The aim of speculation in its truest sense has been dearly and profoundly stated by Pere Gagnebet in a recent number of the Revue Thomiste (Avril, 1988, p. 284). The end of every science is to know its object; and the object of philosophy is being, the object of theology is God. Both start from first principles: philosophy from self-evident principles furnished by reason, theology from principles accepted as evident by faith, namely the articles of faith. It is not the aim of philosophy and theology to find new first principles; nor is it their sole work to uncover what is virtually contained in this or that particular principle. Rather their primary work is to make known a secondary proposition by relating it to the primary propositions which contain the raison d'être of its truth, as we have done above in putting a situation to work or in looking back over the shoulder of the principle "the end is the beginning." The essential rôle of theological reasoning then is analogous to the essential rôle of philosophical
thinking. It is, simply, to find this causal connection between the different parts of divine teaching. As to the principles themselves, the articles of faith, theology does not demonstrate them any more than philosophy demonstrates its self-evident principles. But theology does penetrate their sense and scientifically elaborates the analogies through which they have been given to us, just as philosophy penetrates its first principles. Perhaps this deepening of the insight into Thomistic principles could be stated more plainly by saying that its ends are the ends of wisdom, the" thinking on three planes at once" which is so startlingly different from mere learning. Ultimately such speculation is no more than a radical explanation, a radical solution. From the very nature of wisdom then, such speculation cannot be without great significance to human life for it deals with those last causes which are the rule and measure of human actions; it must be in the truest sense practical. The same truth is evident from the very nature of philosophy and theology for these sciences and wisdom intertwine. There are, after all, just two varieties of wisdom, the natural and the supernatural, the wisdom of the philosopher and the wisdom of the theologian, human and divine wisdom.

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ORIGINAL THOUGHT OR THE PROCESS OF SPECULATION

Original thought is nothing more than speculative thought in its truest sense; it is the manner in which the speculation in which we are interested is accomplished. Perhaps some of our terror of original thought is a byproduct of the age in which we live, an age that is in terror of very human things because it has forgotten or denied the humanity of man. But more probably the fact that a genius does produce original thought coupled with the no less evident fact that we are not geniuses has led us to look upon original thought as something far above the ordinary mind. The conclusion, of course, should be, not that we are incapable of original thought, but rather that our original thought will hardly be of the same calibre as that of a genius. Surely it will be no less original for it will be no less human. Originality in thought really means humanity in thought. It is all very well for the angels to penetrate a principle to its depths in one magnificent glance; that is their nature. Our intellectual progress is of a different character for we are not angels. There is, for instance, that linear progress by way of problem solving, substituting more correct answers, the progress that is proper to science; but in this we are not interested for it leaves unslaked man's thirst for a knowledge of reality and of God. There is another human intellectual progress which does slake that human thirst for knowledge of reality and of God, a progress that does not mean leaving something behind but rather "exalting the towers and extending the gardens" of a man's home. This progress is by that penetrating insight which we have called original thought. We are not angels. Indeed, in the world of intellect we are children. If we are to penetrate a principle, to progress intellectually in this second way, we must do so by those

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"far-flung comparisons" of which Chesterton speaks. Our knowledge is a child's knowledge, a knowledge by contrast for we know by composing and dividing: so we have imagination to furnish us with unlimited material for contrast and memory which gives back the diverse material for contrast which has fallen within our experience. And this material for contrast is always strictly our own, strictly
personal; it is the guarantee of originality in our thought. The actual process is comparable to the process of a playwright who builds up a character complete to the last detail, then sets his character down in a set of circumstances with which the playwright is familiar and his play writes itself. For original thought we have only to set down a principle, whose terms are well understood, in a set of human circumstances with which we are familiar and watch what happens. As a principle it has universal or at least general application and so of course it applies to this situation. Or, on the other hand, taking a situation or event whose full significance we wish to probe, it is only necessary to discover the principle underlying it (for example, by comparison with similar situations) and then put the principle to work in its diverse applications.

SOME EXAMPLES

A. Thinking from a principle:

1. The example given above in examining the principle "the end is the beginning." We have both contrasted it with other principles and have placed it in different situations.

2. The principle: "The higher the nature the more immanent its act" set down among living things

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reveals the beautiful hierarchy of life ascending step by step from the lowest form of plant life with its minimum degree of immanency which is yet sufficient to set it off sharply from the inorganic world, to the mysterious completeness of the immanency in the Godhead.

3. The principle: "That only is a cause of terror which has an extrinsic cause" put to work in the lives of men and women makes clear the solid foundation of the serene security of man's soul which is inviolable to any extrinsic cause short of God; the helplessness of the devil and of sin; the degree to which an age haunted by fear has lost consciousness of its humanity.

4. "For pleasure (or joy) three things are necessary: a good, possessed (united to us) and a consciousness of that union or possession," shows the impossibility of happiness in an age that denies man his human goods and the secret of the normal difference between a happy man and an unhappy man for, since no man is shorn of all good and no man is free from all evil, the difference will be in the constant consciousness of the good possessed or the evil afflicting us.

B. Thinking to a principle:

1. Examining the present human situation presented by indiscriminate bombing we are led from a consideration of the nature of war to the real question behind the modern controversies--what constitutes the "enemy" in war? This is a question the answer of which will involve clear logical application of our notions of the relation and possible
distinction of a people to its government and the limitations of self-defense,

2. Or again from the indignation aroused by the disregard of treaties, the violations of boundaries and undeclared wars we are led to consider the cause of that indignation. Looking at other situations which have aroused indignation, we see in this present indignation a conviction that rights have been violated and obligations flouted. The basis of rights and obligations is law. What obliging power has international law and whence is its power? What natural obligations are involved? And we are on our way to a radical understanding of both the indignation and the international disregard of treaties and boundaries.

A DESCRIPTION OF ORIGINAL THOUGHT

Original thought, then, is merely thinking to or from a principle, surely in itself not a rare or fearsome thing; rather it is the ordinary human thing except to a world that has forgotten what man looks like. Or, to put it in another way, this speculation which is original thought is no more than an enlivening of the principles; in contrast to a mere absorption of principles comparable to storing winter clothes in moth-balls, it puts the principles actively to work. Such thinking merely means that the principles are not stored away in the attic of our minds; they are used. We might call it "active" thinking in contrast to passive acceptance of principles. Of course if we are going to use our principles, if we are going to contrast them with the material furnished by memory and imagination, we are forced to originality for always the material of contrast must have a personal tinge, an individual slant that no one else can give. This is, after all, our memory, our imagination.

AN ARTICLE FOR The Thomist

Ideally then, an article for The Thomist should furnish a speculative solution to a speculative question which needs solution; and by speculative solution we mean no more than a thoroughly scientific process of original thought. Over and above such a speculative solution, the article for The Thomist should conclude with a broad visualization of the significance of this solution; for until such a visualization is had there is no true speculation. The solution is inevitably original because of the personal character of one of the terms of contrast, as we have seen. But it must not be overlooked that the solution will always involve real thought because of the decisive nature of the contrast; and as "active thought" it will always be productive. Its productiveness or broad significance can be stated in terms of its implications and possible applications. If the question has been speculative and its solution of the same character, it must have further implications for by it we have deepened our insight into the principles and so have come to see some of the truths wrapped up in, implied, intangled with that principle. Such things are what we mean by the implications of a speculative solution. Such implications will serve both as a check on and a further deepening of the principles and will immediately open up further fields for study, furnish the readers with springboards for their own "active
thought." The uncovering of such implications calls for exactly the same process of creative imagination or childish contrast as did the solution. And this is perhaps why St. Thomas calls the perfection of the imagination one of the principal condi-

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tions for the perfection of speculative thought. (2a2ae, q. 51, a. B). The speculative solution, because it is speculative, will have something of the universal nature of a principle. And that means that it can be set down in this or that situation and do much radical explaining. These possibilities of the solution are really possibilities of application, possibilities to be indicated (not worked out) in the concluding paragraphs of the article as a spur to more detailed study. Our particular Dominican contribution lies in the presentation of the solution and its implications, and the indication of the possible applications. Others who have not had the privilege of using St. Thomas as a text-book can carry on brilliantly with the applications if we but furnish them with the metaphysical background.

THE DIFFICULTY OF BEGINNING

Let us suppose now that our objections against speculation and original thought have been answered. We know what is wanted for *The Thomist* and pretty well how to go about it. Will we sit down and get to work at an article? Perhaps the answer might be "yes" if it were not for the one remaining fear—the very human fear of making mistakes. Of course mistakes are going to be made. A child learning to walk falls again and again and no one considers its falls major tragedies. As long as the child clammers to its feet again it is making healthy progress; only if the infant decides to remain flat on its face in the conviction that it can stroll through life in that position, is it in a bad way. Our thought is a child’s thought by way of contrast and we never cease learning to think. Of course we will make mistakes. But the intellectually honest man feels much

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the same way about his errors as we feel about the tumbles of the baby. The fact that errors will be made is not a sufficient reason for refusing to make the attempt to think. After all no one expects results proper to a genius. What is desperately needed is our own honest thinking proceeding from a Dominican background that is distinctively ours. We will always have something to give that no others have. It is that original part that is wanted particularly for *The Thomist*. The editorial staff of *The Thomist* exists in order to bring that original contribution to the fore, not to destroy it or frown upon it. Its work will be to give whatever benefit can be given by cooperation at any and all stages of the working out of a question.

REWARDS

At any rate this latest venture of our Province is worth any chances we may take, any setbacks we may suffer, any discouragements that may come our way. Our world has had far too much of clinical and casuistic thinking, too much of airy theory-spinning totally divorced from the facts of human life. There has been too
much of quotation and too little of thought; too much of facts and very little of the meaning of facts. This work of ours will contribute to originality of thought, to solutions rather than compromises with immediately pressing questions. It will furnish intellectual food of a quality fitting the dignity of human nature and furnish material for the joyous work of Wisdom. It will contribute to the development of leadership for surely leadership must take its rise in thinking from principles, not from cases or from mere factual knowledge. It will give weapons of defense against the inhuman dogmas of the day by bringing to life the rational principles which answer the arguments against man’s nature and man’s Faith. It is, in a word, a venture worth all that it will cost in worry, suffering and work. It is a project worthy of the sons of Dominic, a testimony to the activity, after seven hundred years, of the spirit of Dominic which looks not to difficulties but to souls.