

## **So What's New About Scholasticism?**



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How Neo-Thomism Helped Shape the Twentieth  
Century

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## SCHOLASTICISM

*This is the earth's most ancient dialogue:  
the rhetoric of water  
explodes on the dogma of stone.  
But the invisible outcome  
is known only to the poet.  
He dips his pen in the rocks  
and writes on a tablet  
of foam.*

Cees Nooteboom, SCHOLASTICISM, in: *Light Everywhere: Selected Poems*, transl. David Colmer, Chicago 2014.

*To say that Thomas was great, that he was a revolutionary, it is necessary to understand in what sense he was one. For, though no one can say he was a reactionary, he is still a man who raised a construction so solid that no subsequent revolutionary has been able to shake it from within – and the most that could be done to it, from Descartes to Hegel to Marx and to Teilhard de Chardin, was to speak of it “from outside.”*

Umberto Eco, “In Praise of Thomas Aquinas,” in: *The Wilson Quarterly*, X/4 (1986): 79.



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Picture of the inside of the Centro Automazione Analisi Linguistica (CAAL), led by Roberto Busa. The picture was taken on June 29, 1967.

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Rajesh Heynickx and Stéphane Symons

## Into Neo-Thomism: Reading the Fabric of an Intellectual Movement

June 29, 1967. Gallarate, Italy. Stiff paper cards, magnetic tapes, silver-green colored machines, ladies in white dustcoats: these elements enacted the first mechanically generated textual oeuvre. From the early 1950s on, 11 million words were processed in this former textile factory. Put together, these are the words that constitute the texts of a Saint who has been dead for 7 centuries: the Dominican friar Thomas Aquinas (1225 – 1274), an influential philosopher, theologian, and jurist. Remarkably enough, this endeavor started from one single person's quest. At the end of the 1940s, the Jesuit Roberto Busa wanted to study the vocabulary coined by Aquinas to express the topic of interiority. But how to perform a text search? A 1949 trip to New York offered a solution. Busa was able to persuade Thomas J. Watson, the founder of IBM, to sponsor the recording of Aquinas's work in a format that would be readable by a machine. The project lasted about 30 years, and eventually lead in the 1970s to the 56 printed volumes of the *Index Thomisticus* which was put online in 2005.

The mastering of Aquinas's massive corpus, so goes the founding myth, indicated the birth of digital humanities. Busa has even been credited for being the inventor of hypertext.<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding that reputation within the field of media archeology, the pioneering Gallarate data storage was rooted in a very tactile encounter with the work of the *Doctor Angelicus*. The female collaborators who manually turned Aquinas' words into punch cards, that is, the presence or absence of holes in paper cards – see the cover of this book –, were indispensable. This tactility reminds us of the thin line that separates the manual from the intellectual. The mastering of texts, even in our present digital age, requires vibrant hands. Subsequently, the workers in Busa's manufactory have something in common with the twentieth century theologians, philosophers, scientists, literators, politicians and artists who are studied in the present volume. All of them have touched Thomas's textual fabric. Directed by various mindsets, they have turned the many pages on which Aquinas's words, or a derivate of them, were noted or printed. In a critical and even reluctant way or, on the contrary, zealous in their efforts to reform society, they have talked and written about Aquinas. It was this mixed group of lovers and haters that, from the late nineteenth century onwards,

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<sup>1</sup> For a critical view on all that: Jones, Steve E., *Roberto Busa, S.J. and the Emergence of Humanities Computing*, London 2016.

would give birth to the phenomenon known as Neo-Thomism, the revival of the study of the principles and methodology of Aquinas.

It is definitely tempting to describe Busa's project as a factory and, more specifically, to interpret his data-processing as a root metaphor of the Thomistic revival in the twentieth century. Firstly, in the same way as Busa's factory converted Aquinas' oeuvre into punch cards, all thinkers appearing in this volume rearranged and thus somehow repackaged Thomas' thoughts. They have all, so to speak, punched Thomas. Secondly, in the same way as Busa was considering the need to (re)assemble the thoughts of one man, told to have mastered all knowledge available in his own time, many thinkers studied in this volume were either hunting for a cultural synthesis or reflecting on the validity of such a search. When considering both these parallels, the goal of this volume lights up: it will offer insight in a *translatio studiorum* by focusing on how certain thought factories (universities, intellectual circles, editorial boards, individuals) and their assembly lines (journal articles, brochures, monographical studies) reproduced or rejected Aquinas' ideas during the twentieth century. Such ambition, all authors in this volume claim, cannot be restricted to a quick mapping of an intellectual infrastructure, nor to a simple inventory of the intellectual backgrounds of those who loved or hated Aquinas. Most of all, it demands a secure analysis of how textual fabrics, some bearing a Neo-Thomistic trademark, others explicitly contesting such a recognizable sign, responded to a changing world. But, the question remains: how to do that and why has it not yet been done?

## I Dissecting a Thought System

In his 1985 essay *Postmortem of a Rebirth: the Catholic Intellectual Renaissance*, James Hitchcock explained how twentieth century Neo-Thomism provided the program for a bold Catholic intellectuality. Indeed, he admitted, the appropriation of the thirteenth century theologian Thomas Aquinas for modern use dated essentially from the authoritative exhortations of Pope Leo XIII. With the Encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, issued on August 4, 1879, Pope Leo had given support to Neo-Thomist or Neo-Scholastic philosophy,<sup>2</sup> as the foundation for a theology envi-

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<sup>2</sup> Scholasticism was a method of critical thought which dominated teaching by the academics ("scholastics", or "schoolmen") of medieval universities in Europe from about 1100 to 1700. Thomas Aquinas was active in this tradition. Neo-Thomists copied Scholasticism's rationalized interpretation of religious belief. They used the same modes of argumentation – expositive, deductive, inductive, axiomatic, analogical, and more. Therefore, Neo-Scholasticism is also known as

sioning an objective and immutable order in a post-Enlightenment world. Yet, Hitchcock argued, the dream of an invincible bulwark of faith that was enshrined in this *Magna Charta* of Neo-Thomism, had not obliterated intellectual flexibility. During the following century, numerous, often converted intellectuals had (in)directly relied on it when attempting to survive in “the flux of change.” While doing so, Neo-Thomism’s agenda had been realized: tailoring an old message to the modern world in order to counter the corrosive effects of modernity. And, so Hitchcock wondered, living in an age of total challenge, shouldn’t that be the ideal of every modern (Catholic) intellectual?<sup>3</sup>

The autopsy of Neo-Thomism undertaken by Hitchcock, resulting in a pathology report with the title ‘emancipation through restoration,’ aptly illustrates how historiography can easily be dominated and molded by a compelling narrative. Similar to how the secularization theory (probably one of the most powerful master narratives in history<sup>4</sup>) has been formative for the whole field of religious studies, the history of twentieth century Neo-Thomism has been anchored in a series of all too narrow portrayals. For a one-dimensional status has largely been rendered on this system of thought on account of the connections between methods of argument striking the balance between reason and faith, and a restorative pope, docile Catholic students or tribal wars in Neo-Scholastic periodicals. It has not been sufficiently taken into account that Neo-Thomism also became part of contingent social contexts and varying intellectual domains. Consequently, the exact way in which it tried to resolve disparities, to annul contradictions, and to reconcile incongruent, new developments, has been largely eclipsed from view. Neo-Thomism’s operative mechanism ended up being concealed rather than revealed.

This volume will break with that dominant tendency. Instead of sewing the body of Neo-Thomism back together after an external, quick examination of its occurrence, popularity or the cause and manner of its (presumed) death as Hitchcock and others did,<sup>5</sup> it will develop an outspoken *internal* dissection.

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Neo-Scholastic Thomism. See on this development: Peitz, Detlef, *Die Anfänge der Neuscholastik in Deutschland und Italien (1818–1870)*, Bonn 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Hitchcock, James, “Postmortem on a rebirth: The Catholic Intellectual Renaissance” in: id., *Years of Crisis: Collected Essays, 1970–1983*, ed. James Hitchcock, San Francisco 1985, 203–216.

<sup>4</sup> Weidner, Daniel, “The Rhetoric of Secularization,” in: *New German Critique*, 41/1 (2014): 1–31. This is also discussed in the introductory chapter of: Chapman, Alister/Coffey, John/Gregory, Brad S., *Seeing Things Their Way. Intellectual History and the Return of Religion*, Notre Dame 2009.

<sup>5</sup> For example: van Melsen, A.G.M., “Wat maakt het neothomisme zo attractief? Beschouwingen over universaliteit, systematiek en inzichtelijkheid” in: *De wijsgerige Thomas. Terugblik op het Neothomisme*, Bernard Delgouw, Baarn 1984, 28–48.

All contributing authors will concentrate on the conceptual tissue of ‘the Neo-Thomistic body’ and how it was shaped and became reshaped over time. How were Neo-Thomist concepts and models, with some whittling and squeezing, made fit for Christian doctrine? Which theoretical assumptions and intellectual norms played a role in that process? And is it correct, as the Italian thinker Guido Morpurgo-Tagliabue contended, to state that Neo-Thomist concepts were deliberately kept “generic and ambiguous” to generate multiple meanings and to facilitate accordance with various ontological systems?<sup>6</sup>

Answering these types of questions demands a thorough understanding of the “micrologics”<sup>7</sup> of texts in which Neo-Thomist terms and models were launched and gradually modified. Yet, it would be wrong to focus solely on the circulation and adaptation of concepts among those who propagated it as the most suitable set of ideas. There was also, as mentioned earlier, another “interpretative community”<sup>8</sup> at work in the history of Neo-Thomism, one formed by those fiercely contesting its schematic nature and all-subsuming worldview. “Turning back the wheel of worldhistory,” that was what Neo-Thomism tried to do, the German philosopher Rudolf Eucken (and with him many others) declared at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>9</sup>

However, the persistent comment on Neo-Thomism’s “static conception of philosophical truth,”<sup>10</sup> could never extirpate all sympathy. Even for the French philosopher Maurice Blondel, renowned for disliking the rigidly scholastic cast of mind that cramped the Catholic theology of his day, Aquinas was a source of inspiration. As he wrote in a letter to his fellow-traveler Lucien Laberthonnière in 1921: “I do not say that I owe a lot to St. Thomas, but he finally helped me to realize better just what to do and not to do. Although his way of thinking often

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6 Morpurgo-Tagliabue, Guido, *L'esthétique contemporaine. Une enquête*, transl. Marcelle Bourrette Serre, Milan 1960, 488.

7 This notion stands central in this tiny book: Verhoeven, Cornelis, *Lof van de micrologie: een voetnoot bij Plato's Politeia*, Baarn 1982, 6–7.

8 A theoretical concept invented by Stanley Fish, denoting the fact that readings of a text are culturally constructed. Fish, Stanley, *Is There a Text in This Class*, New Haven 1980, 147–174.

9 “das Rad der Weltgeschichte zurückdrehen” Eucken, Rudolf, *Thomas von Aquino und Kant. Ein Kampf zweier Welten*, Berlin 1901, 10–11 and 18.

10 Gény, Paul, “Scholastic philosophy and modern mentality” in: *Present-day thinkers and the New Scholasticism. An international symposium*, John S. Zybur, St. Louis et al 1926, 168. In 1926, this was already an old trope. See the critical comments on neo-Thomism listed up in: La Piana, George, “Recent Tendencies in Roman Catholic Theology,” in: *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 15/No. 3 (July 1922): 233–292.

extremely irritates me, I admit that I also get from him some lightning stimulation.”<sup>11</sup>

As it would be totally wrong to define Neo-Thomism as a parochial project of like-minded believers, it would be equally incorrect to consider it to be a homogeneous phenomenon. From its very beginning the “Rückgriff auf Scholastisches Erbe”<sup>12</sup> encompassed factions. The dividing question was as urgent as simple: how should one relate to Thomas’s texts? Those who stressed the importance of historical study of Thomas were portrayed as ‘paleo-Thomists’ by those who situated their engagement with Aquinas’ oeuvre in the context of contemporary, especially ideological agenda’s.<sup>13</sup> And to make things even more complex: the latter camp also witnessed complex ramifications. For Emmanuel Mounier, the theologian and essayist who was the guiding spirit in the French personalist movement of the interwar period, the manifold possible meanings of being-a-Thomist were paramount. In a 1939 letter to his intimate friend Jacques Maritain, also a preeminent interpreter of Aquinas, he summed up the multiple prefixes Thomists could attach to: “We – how to say? – hemithomists, parathomists, propinquextrathomists.”<sup>14</sup> Mounier’s self-irony was spot on. His remark that Thomists could be at the same time ‘at one side,’ ‘beyond’ or ‘nearby/out of’ Thomas, points at what Bernard McGinn has called the “contested varieties of Thomism in the twentieth century.”<sup>15</sup>

Pope Leo’s ambition to overcome intellectual fragmentation by uniting all Catholics under the umbrella of Neo-Thomism, never became a full reality during the twentieth century. Despite the rapid diffusion of standardized textbooks and journals, manuals and translations via a powerful network of seminars and

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11 “Je n’irai pas jusqu’à dire que je dois beaucoup à Saint Thomas, mais enfin il m’a aidé à mieux me rendre compte de ce qu’il ya à faire et à ne pas faire. Si très souvent sa forme de pensée m’irrite à l’extrême, j’avoue que je rencontre aussi chez lui des lumières et des stimulations.” Letter by Maurice Blondel to Lucien Laberthonnière, august 9 1921. Published in: Tresmontant, Claude (ed.) *Maurice Blondel. Lucien Laberthonnière. Correspondance Philosophique*, Paris 1961, 296.

12 This is the title of the second volume of the following three volume history of Catholic philosophy: Coreth, Emerich/Neidl W.M./Pfligersdorffer G. (ed.), *Christliche Philosophie im katholischen Denken des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, Graz et al. 1988.

13 For this term, one should look at the discussions gathered in: Janssens, E., *Comment suivrons-nous Saint Thomas? Vrai Thomisme et faux Thomisme*, Brussels et al. 1925.

14 Letter written by Emmanuel Mounier to Jacques Maritain, dating from 1939. Published in the following edited correspondence: Petit, Jacques (ed.), *Jacques Maritain-Emmanuel Mounier (1929–1939)*, Paris 1973, p. 102.

15 McGinn, Bernard, *Thomas Aquinas’s Summa Theologiae. A Biography*, Princeton et al. 2014, 186. Essential reading is chapter five of this study: ‘The rise and Fall of Neothomism.’

universities, greater unity was often more far away than nearby. That is a remarkable thing. As the intellectual historian Ed Baring recently wrote: “Neo-Scholasticism is certainly unusual. Few other schools of thought in the modern period could reach its international reach, few defined themselves by the appeal to such a distant past, and few enjoyed the level of institutional support that the Catholic Church offered neo-scholasticism.” The archive of old texts the neo-scholasticists capitalized on, Baring explains, only contained the *possibility* of a coherent whole. As these texts were never read or commented on in one and the same way everywhere, Neo-Thomism’s project of international intellectual exchange rooting in an old tradition, was condemned to face diverging interpretations causing inner contestation.<sup>16</sup>

## II Connecting the Dots

When overseeing its internal fissures, and considering its amazing topicality – for Jacques Maritain Thomas was simply the all-around ‘apostle of modern times’<sup>17</sup> –, marking Neo-Thomism as a free-floating and even empty signifier would probably be the easiest option. Trying to understand it as a bewildering, yet decipherable maze would form a more daring alternative. This volume opts for the latter. It will work a way out of the labyrinthine intellectual movement that Neo-Thomism was, by circling deeper into it. In the first place, this volume will concentrate on *the purpose* of ideas and arguments. That implies the development of a ‘why question’ focusing on actors, their agendas and (re)formulations. Secondly, this book will pay attention to how ideas and arguments were *transferred*. Which were the vehicles, namely artistic media or scientific disciplines, mobilized to spread (some version of) Aquinas’ words? The combination of these two perspectives will not result in a well-delineated history of the rise and decline of Neo-Thomism in the twentieth century – assuming it would be possible to write one anyway. What will arise is a sharper insight in a recalibration of what Nils Gilman once termed as the “macrohistorical quantum known as modernity.”<sup>18</sup> As we will see, this recalibration was highly variegated: apart from a full or partial engagement with modern developments, attempts to reverse

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<sup>16</sup> Baring, Edward, “Ideas on the Move: Context in Transnational Intellectual History,” in: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, LXXVII/4 (October 2016): 583.

<sup>17</sup> Gottier, G., “Thomisme et modernité,” in: S. Bonino (ed.), *Saint Thomas au XXe siècle*, Paris 1995, 352–361.

<sup>18</sup> Gilman, Nils, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America*, Baltimore 2003, 25.

these same developments and, equally, explicit endeavors to contest them, will be analyzed.

The first part of the book already brings together four different essays that bring to the surface that Neo-Thomism was in many ways more concerned with the future than with the past. For numerous influential intellectuals, the Neo-Thomist framework served as a crucial point of reference, not merely for the attempt to come to terms with an increasingly modern society, but also, and even, for the active quest for renewal and modernization. The first part of this book therefore starts with an expansion of the conceptual reach of Neo-Thomist thought beyond its epistemological and religious scope, exploring its relevance for the political, social and architectural endeavor to give shape to a world in rapid transition.

In the first essay of this collection, “The Thomist Debate over Inequality and Property Rights in Depression-Era Europe,” James Chappel discovers, within the very heart of the return to the *Summa*, not only a fully fleshed out, social philosophy but even a social-political project with a distinctly anti-capitalist dimension. Analyzing the response to the economic crisis during the Depression era (1928–1931), Chappel zooms in on the work of thinkers like Sándor Horváth and Jacques Maritain and reconstructs both their plea in favor of a restriction of the right to poverty and their account of the moral obligation to distribute wealth. While some of these ideas are marked with a potentially revolutionary implication, each can be retraced to important conceptual distinctions in the *Summa* (such as the distinctions between property and use, law and love). Pitting this anti-capitalist rhetoric against defenders of capitalism such as Johannes Messner and Oswald von Nell-Breuning who take recourse of the very same religious source, Chappel thus casts light on a debate about property and modern economics that divided Neo-Thomist thought from within.

In “Religion, human rights and democracy in post-1940 France in theory and practice: from Maritain’s Thomism to Vignaux’s secular realism,” Wim Weymans turns to the political repercussions of Neo-Thomist thought. Starting off with Jacques Maritain’s take on the relationship between politics, democracy and religion, Weymans examines how the appeal to modern ideals such as human rights and democracy could at the time be inspired by Thomistic, natural law and eternal, Christian values. In spite of the Church’s earlier defense of collective rather than individual rights, Maritain was able to reconcile a modern attitude vis-à-vis human rights with a pre-modern, religious and philosophical inspiration. Weymans compares Maritain’s Neo-Thomistic blend of religious and political thought with the perspective of the French Christian trade unionist Paul Vignaux who, as a student of Neo-Thomist scholar Etienne Gilson, was equally versed in medieval philosophy. Vignaux’s own attempt to find inspiration in religion for contempo-

rary political issues was, however, much more cautionary than Maritain's. Influenced by Reinhold Niebuhr's stern warning against the sinful "pretension to knowledge" Vignaux combines a plea for political commitment with a criticism of self-righteousness and dogmatism.

With the third contribution to this section, "Epistemological Tracks. On Religion, Words and Buildings in 1950's Belgium," Rajesh Heynickx dissects how in 1950's Belgium, diverse aesthetic theories were developed to tackle the modernizing architecture of religious buildings. These theories tried to offer an operative intellectual language by indicating how to merge traditional values with modern architectural forms. In doing so, they were often essential for combining a rationalist functionalism with religious emotions. They enabled architects and intellectuals to absorb, ventilate and legitimize concepts and, by doing so, (in)directly shaped architectural practice. Heynickx focuses on the battle between two art philosophical paradigms mobilized to strengthen those theories, namely Neo-Thomism and phenomenology. An analysis of these conflicting modes of thought shows how form and meaning, emotion and religion became linked in the Belgian cultural field of the 1950's. On the other hand, such analysis also demonstrates that although the opposition between 'Left' and 'Right,' 'existentialists' versus 'Thomists' really existed, architects and theorists could also defend an 'open Thomism' or become fascinated by 'Christian existentialism,' both based on an interplay of feeling and knowing. The growth of those hybrid theories, used to keep the relation between cognition and affectivity under the scope of the radar, reveals a lasting epistemological clash in Belgian philosophy.

John Carter Wood's text "When Personalism Met Planning: Jacques Maritain and a British Christian Intellectual Circle, 1937–1949" looks into the influence of Maritain's ideas about pluralism, personalism and a novel, secular but Christian society on a group of British church-organizers, intellectuals and publicists who went under the name of the Oldham group and were active from the late 1930s until the late 1940s. The connection with Neo-Thomism has often been an equivocal and ambiguous one, with intellectuals and policy-makers borrowing bits and pieces from a system of thought that they were not willing to adopt in its entirety. The members of the Oldham group, for instance, did not consider themselves as Thomists (in fact, the group was almost entirely protestant) but they exemplify the complexity of cultural exchange and interaction in that the impact of Maritain's "true humanism" was both fundamental and selective (and at times even contradictory). In Maritain's work, the Oldham group not only found a shared diagnosis of the dangers of amoral liberalism, shallow individualism and totalitarianism, but also a convincing solution that overcomes the unique emphasis on the individual.

In the second section of the volume, we explore some of the many interactions between Neo-Thomism and other prominent philosophies and schools of thought of the Twentieth Century. Neo-Thomism, that is to say, not only fashioned an intellectual response to society's changes and challenges but also entered into debate with some of the relatively new philosophical systems of thought, such as phenomenology or existentialism, that gave color to the intellectual climate of the Twentieth Century. In his essay "Neo-Scholasticism, Phenomenology, and the Problem of Conversion" Edward Baring investigates the reception of phenomenology by Neo-Thomist thought. In countries like France, Belgium, Italy and Spain, the Neo-Thomist reaction to the phenomenological study of the human faculties of experience was oftentimes a welcoming and supportive one. Charmed by phenomenology's interest in intuition, the epistemology that underlies phenomenology came together with implications for religion and faith, thereby at times growing, as it were, into a conversion machine. Philosophers like Désiré Mercier, Joseph Geyser or Léon Noël played a pivotal role in the attempt to win over the analyses of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (1900) for the Neo-Scholastic cause. With the publication of Husserl's *Ideas* in 1913, however, the turn towards a transcendental idealism brought about an emphasis on the world-constituting powers of the ego, which was increasingly hard to reconcile with more traditional and strict accounts of Thomism. This turn towards subjectivity necessitated philosophers like Etienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain to problematize the link between phenomenology and Neo-Scholasticism while at the same time leaving open a space for more nuanced negotiations (René Krieger, Erich Przywara, Sofia Vanni Rovighi, Daniel Feuling).

Dries Bosschaert's contribution to his volume, "A Great Deal of Controversy? A Case Study of Dondeyne, Grégoire, and Moeller Integrating Phenomenology and Existentialism in Louvain Neo-Thomism" continues this argument and focuses on the "open" Neo-Thomism that was conceived in the Ecclesial Faculties of the University of Louvain. With the encyclical *Humani Generis* (1950), Neo-Thomism was once again confirmed as the solid frame of reference for all religious and moral matters. The critical remarks against existentialism and phenomenology that were included in *Humani Generis*, however, opened up the debate about the possibility to dissolve these more recent schools of thought from atheism and the dangerous type of epistemology they were frequently associated with. With case-studies that focus on the Louvain professors Albert Dondeyne, Franz Grégoire, and Charles Moeller, Bosschaert presents three different strategies of mediation between Neo-Thomism, existentialism and phenomenology. Dondeyne discovered existentialism and phenomenology as welcome additions to a Neo-Thomism that was in need of self-renewal because it assisted in the recognition of the historicity of human subjectivity, the fight against relativism, and

the attempt to overcome the duality between reason and irrationality. Grégoire's interaction with phenomenology and existentialism, however, was a more careful one in that he emphasized that Neo-Thomism's universalist and metaphysical underpinnings could not but result in tensions with the more recent account of human existence and experience. Still, even Grégoire was convinced that the phenomenological analysis of pre-reflexive intuition could, while not being a sufficient answer in itself, be a source of inspiration for the Neo-Thomist understanding of the human being's *lumen naturale*. Charles Moeller, for his part, treated the recent waves of existentialist and phenomenological thought foremost as a *cultural* phenomenon that, through literature, painted an interesting view of the human condition of responsibility and fragility.

The question that underlies Adi Efal-Lautenschläger's contribution to this section, "Gilson's Poietics," is to what extent this famous Neo-Scholastic's writings on art can be termed *Thomistic*, given that the *Summa* does not even include a systematic analysis of art and aesthetics to begin with. In pitting Étienne Gilson and Jacques Maritain's philosophies of art against one another, Efal-Lautenschläger uncovers opposing views on realism, creation, art and, not at all insignificant to these debates, Henri Bergson's *L'évolution créatrice*. More accurately labelled Neo-Aristotelian than Neo-Thomistic, Gilson's views on art are nevertheless wedded to the overarching Neo-Scholastic framework of his overall philosophy, though not without thereby counterbalancing some the deeply religious presuppositions that underlie Maritain's writings on art.

### III A Newly Folded Tradition

In the early decades of the Twentieth Century, Jacques Maritain was present at a lecture delivered by Einstein in the Sorbonne in Paris. He also wrote a study on Relativity. That reveals the Neo-Thomist desire to continue to engage with the most novel evolutions and recent discoveries in science. Of course, the post-medieval condition had opened up a gap between religion and modern science that necessitated Scholastic thought to reconsider its own epistemological status in the centuries that followed. In the third section of this volume, we bring together essays that reflect on three different cases in which Twentieth Century Neo-Thomism actively sought a conceptual discussion with modern science. While the *Summa* could at the time of its writing in a way even be considered a form of science, its adaptations in the Twentieth Century resulted in the urge for a more subtle and nuanced approach.

Sigrid Leyssen and Annette Mülberger's contribution to this volume, "Psychology from a Neo-Thomist Perspective: The Louvain-Madrid Connection," con-

siders the interaction between Neo-Thomism and modern psychology. Looking at the connection between Louvain and Madrid, two periods of increased contact are singled out, the first around 1900 and the second after the Spanish Civil War. Leyssen and Mülberger paint the picture of a smooth dialogue between Neo-Thomism and modern psychology on account of the Neo-Thomist distinction between empirical and rational psychology. In Louvain as well as in Madrid, Désiré Mercier, Marcelino Arnáiz or Juan Zaragüeta combine a rationalist and metaphysical foundation that was borrowed from Aristotle and Thomas with an appreciation of empirical data. This stand was capable of arguing against positivist and Kraussist tendencies within modern psychology and prepared the path for the experimental work of Catholic lay psychologists such as Albert Michotte, José Germain and Mariano Yela. While leaving behind the religious and metaphysical presuppositions of their predecessors, these thinkers stretched the domain of empirical research to such an extent that they could accommodate some of the main concerns of the Neo-Thomistic framework.

In “Science contra Science: The Battle for Legitimate Knowledge in the Spanish Catholic Journals in the Early Twentieth Century,” Jaume Navarro extends the analysis of the Spanish context by shifting the focus on the response of Neo-Thomist intellectuals to the accusation that Catholicism would be inimical to modern science and progress. Taking two prominent, Jesuit journals, *Razón y Fe* and *Ibérica*, as points of departure, Navarro recovers the view of what *true* science was or had to be under the influence of Neo-Thomistic convictions. *Razón y Fe*, for instance, actively engaged with scientific discoveries such as radioactivity and atomism and oftentimes accepted the provisional nature of modern science, albeit while opposing it to the absolute truth of traditional (i.e., Scholastic) metaphysics. *Ibérica*’s tone was less apologetic in that it largely avoided overarching and far-reaching discussions, emphasizing instead the religious and patriotic contributions of the Jesuits and Christians at large to the national natural sciences, technology and industry.

Still, Neo-Thomism’s involvement with the most novel types and forms of science not only lights up in outspoken missionary projects like the one conducted by Jesuits and Dominicans. It also surfaces where one would not expect it. In Christopher Morrissey’s article “The Analogy of Marshall McLuhan” the volume turns to one of the founders of media theory. Throughout his entire career, McLuhan’s thoughts about logic were indebted to Thomism. Morrissey zooms in on McLuhan’s concept of analogy and his criticism of the “realist” views of the Neo-Thomists of his day. McLuhan’s recourse to analogy was in his view closer to Thomas than Neo-Thomism itself and it prepared the groundwork for his idea that the laws of media can be considered as a “universal grammar.” Morrissey argues that McLuhan’s convictions about the existence of such a “universal

grammar” ultimately rests on the Thomist idea that intellectual cognition can be traced back to its analogical origin in the senses. Laying out the remarkable influence of Thomas, John of Salisbury and Etienne Gilson, Morrissey reconstructs the Thomist framework behind McLuhan’s analysis of modern media and his argument that a kind of analogical thinking is required to understand the action of signs.

As mentioned above, the revival of Thomism was launched in 1879 by Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical *Aeterni Patris* arguing that the true response to modern, secular society needed to be mediated through a careful revisiting of the writings of Thomas. This volume closes with two articles that pay close attention to the Neo-Thomist ambition to mediate tradition while keeping a sharp eye on the present and the future. Herman Paul’s “Vetera Novis Augere: Neo-Scholastic Philosophers and Their Concepts of Tradition” examines the oft-heard argument that Neo-Scholasticism lacks historical sensitivity on account of an over-emphasis on systematic and eternal truths. Singling out the case of the Institute of Philosophy at the KU Leuven, Paul argues that philosophers from Mercier to Van Steenberghe tried to avoid both an exaggerated form of historicity, as if the distance between past and present would be too large to still find inspiration in Thomist philosophy, and an exaggerated denial of historicity (as if traditional Thomism could simply be recovered in full). In Paul’s account, the Louvain philosophers framed this attitude through various conceptions of the notion of “tradition” thus salvaging it from dogmatism and static-mindedness and discovering it, instead, as a tool for a dynamic and innovative engagement with the past.

In his text, “Thomas Aquinas or John Henry Newman? The Intellectual Itinerary of Johannes Willebrands,” Karim Schelkens describes the intellectual journey of the Dutch clergyman Johannes Willebrands (1909–2006) as an exemplification of the increased inability of Neo-Thomism to engage with lived, religious experience in a modernizing society. Caught between the modernist crisis and the renewals of Vatican II, Willebrands gradually moved away from the Neo-Scholastic framework in which he was brought up. Willebrands began reading Newman’s work before the start of his doctoral project, initially conceived as a Neo-Thomist refutation of Newman’s philosophical writings. Before long, however, Willebrands found himself in an intellectual impasse because he believed that Neo-Thomism could not sufficiently deal with the complex manner in which concrete individuals arrive at religious experiences. This ultimately led to a doctoral thesis that was deemed insufficiently loyal to the Neo-Thomist cause and hardly fit for publication.

In the same way as Willebrands’s doctoral dissertation resulted from a set of shifting thought systems, the present volume entails a stratification of multiple layers. Far more than offering a thematically ordered compendium of the modern

reception of a medieval thinker known for his rational investigation or discernment of conditions, this book traces the various possibilities which were retrieved in Aquinas' completed system and dissects their absorption in different international and disciplinary environments. Therefore, all authors evoke an intricate network of forgotten conceptual relations. They interweave texts and understudied contexts. They add new contacts and links to twentieth century intellectual history. In many ways, they produce a new fabric, another set of punch cards. It is up to the reader to place these cards.

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## Part I **Shaping A New Society**







James Chappel

# The Thomist Debate over Inequality and Property Rights in Depression-Era Europe

In recent years, inequality has become a topic of burning moral and political concern. The notion that a rising tide will lift all ships is increasingly implausible in a world of shipwrecks. Many agree that property relations will have to be reformed, perhaps radically so, in the interest of social justice. But what is “property” in the first place—does it mean anything beyond a bundle of legal claims? Curiously, the interest in inequality has not led to a revival of interest in this question. Thomas Piketty’s *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, for instance, treats the theme of inequality in encyclopedic detail but has no theory of property. Piketty is not alone. As Thomas Merrill and Henry Smith have pointed out, “property has fallen out of fashion,” as philosophers and theorists have ceased paying much attention to the issue.<sup>1</sup> The history of philosophy, of course, provides immense resources to answer this question: until not long ago, it was a major theme of reflection across the human sciences. Thinkers like Locke, Hume, and Mill have pondered the origins of property rights, while Marx, Proudhon, and their followers attacked the institution of property at its root. Jedediah Purdy has recently looked to early American law and Enlightenment thought, showing that there exist critical appreciations of property that seek to reform but not abolish the institution.<sup>2</sup> In a kindred spirit, this essay will focus on Thomism: a theory that, like American jurisprudence and unlike anarchism or even Marxism, has access to institutional resources that make it a living tradition for hundreds of millions of people.

Most histories of modern Thomism have focused on its epistemological and ontological dimensions in lieu of its social or ethical ones.<sup>3</sup> The story of the Thomist theological revival is by now quite well known, as are the many conflicts that pitted traditionalists like Jacques Maritain against transcendental Thomists like Joseph Maréchal. Thomism, however, was always more than a theological

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1 Merrill, Thomas W./Smith, Henry E., “What Happened to Property in Law and Economics?” in: *The Yale Law Journal* 111 (2001): 357–98, 357.

2 Purdy, Jedediah, *The Meaning of Property: Freedom, Community, and the Legal Imagination*, New Haven 2010.

3 See, for instance, the excellent McCool, Gerald A., *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century: The Quest for a Unitary Method*, New York 1977. For a recent exception, see Misner, Paul, *Catholic Labor Movements in Europe: Social Thought and Action, 1914–1965*, Washington, D.C. 2015.

doctrine: it was a social one, too, and Thomist theories of the economy were just as widely debated as Thomist theories of the intellect were. This tradition has had an immense impact on the social teachings of Pope John Paul II, Pope Francis, and legions of priests and missionaries across the world. It is one of the most vibrant and influential traditions of social thinking and social justice in existence, and yet its history is poorly understood.

This essay will treat a particularly important episode in that history. Between 1928 and 1931, as the Depression rolled across the continent, a furious debate broke out over Catholic theories of property. At the time, the Church had not yet spoken definitely about capitalism, and Catholics across the continent struggled to articulate what the Church had to say about the crisis. This led to an anti-capitalist form of Thomist ethics, which specifically took aim at the sanctity of private property by arguing that state-led redistribution, and not merely charity, was required by natural law. Theologically, this was primarily the work of those influenced by classical Dominican commentators like Cajetan; socially, it took advantage of the widespread critique of capitalism that was commonplace in Catholic circles (and non-Catholic ones, too). This coincided with a separate tradition—largely Jesuit, and less concerned with the intricacies of Thomist texts—according to which Catholic social teaching could make peace with any economic system, including capitalism and its attendant doctrines of property. From this perspective, the rich should share their excess wealth under the rubric of voluntary charity, not involuntary law. This debate largely came to a close with *Quadragesimo anno* (1931), drafted by German Jesuits. The encyclical placed the sanctity of private property at the heart of a healthy social order, said nothing about capitalism (a loud silence), and enjoined the rich to share out of beneficence, not out of legal duty. Henceforth, the most radical interpretations of Thomist property doctrines fell out of favor in Catholic circles, and most Catholic social thinkers from 1931 onwards pursued a “third way” that accepted the basic class structure of the capitalist order as a given while subjecting private property to the dictates of the common good in various ways.

## I The Thomist Assault on Private Property

For the many Catholics interested in questioning the pieties of liberal capitalism in the era of the Great Depression, Aquinas was a useful source to think with. In his *Summa Theologica*, he had provided a theory of property that differed from anarchist, Marxist, and liberal views alike. The section on property is short and somewhat ambiguous. According to one plausible reading, at least, Aquinas did not dispute private property as an institution, but he did refuse to legitimate