

ETIENNE GILSON

*Thomism*

*The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*

Translated by †Laurence K. Shook and Armand Maurer

Etienne Gilson published six editions of his book devoted to the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. The appearance of these editions, the first in 1917 and the last in 1965, covers much of the scholarly life of their author. As he says in his Preface, the book was his lifelong companion. The editions represent a sustained effort to set forth his developing views on the philosophy of the man who, in Gilson's opinion, most profoundly sought out the heart of reality: being, understood as the act of existing (*esse*). Gilson presents his thoughts on this subject with new clarity and precision in his revised sixth and final edition, which is here put into English for the first time.

While probing into Thomas' philosophy, Gilson measures it against the views of his predecessors: notably Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and the Pseudo-Dionysius among the Greeks, and Avicenna and Averroes in the Islamic world. Among the Latins, he pays particular attention to the views of Augustine, Boethius, Anselm, and in his own century to those of Alexander of Hales and Bonaventure. Gilson sees Aquinas as retrieving much of the long tradition of philosophy in which he was schooled, but surpassing it with his original insights and developments. Most important, in Gilson's opinion, is that Thomas goes beyond the essentialist ontology bequeathed to the Middle Ages by Augustine, among others, and reaches a "new ontology" which is truly existential.

With this leitmotif, in Part I Gilson explores Thomas' notions of the existence and nature of God and our access to them. Part II examines the emanation of the world from God and the hierarchy of creatures, culminating in the human person. Part III contains Gilson's fullest treatment of Thomas' moral doctrine, featuring the human act, its principles, and the personal, social, and religious life. While stressing the strictly rational character of Thomistic philosophy in the way it reaches its conclusions, this edition, like its predecessors, emphasizes its development within Thomas' theology and the guidance it receives from the Christian faith.



ETIENNE GILSON SERIES 24

Etienne Gilson

*Thomism*

*The Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*

*A translation of*

LE THOMISME

*Sixth and final edition*

*by*

†Laurence K. Shook

and

Armand Maurer



PONTIFICAL INSTITUTE OF MEDIAEVAL STUDIES

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*The translation is dedicated to*

Donal P. Murnaghan

*and to*

Dorothy V. Maurer



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## Translator's Introduction

This book is a translation of the sixth and final edition of Etienne Gilson's *Le Thomisme: Introduction à la philosophie de saint Thomas d'Aquin*.<sup>1</sup> The editions of this work have a long history. Gilson published the first edition in Strasbourg in 1919, the fruit of his first teaching of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas at the University of Lille in 1913–1914.<sup>2</sup> The slim volume of 174 pages (which Gilson called “the first miserable edition”)<sup>3</sup> bore the title: *Le Thomisme: Introduction au système de S. Thomas d'Aquin*. A slightly larger edition was published with the same title in Paris by Joseph Vrin in 1922. A more ample and revised edition was printed by the same publisher with the same title in Paris in 1927. In 1924, prior to its publication in French, Edward Bullough was authorized to translate this third version, giving it the simple title *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*. In 1929 Bullough put out a second and enlarged edition of his translation with the same title. In 1942 Gilson brought out a fourth augmented edition of his book with the new title (dropping the word “system”): *Le Thomisme: Introduction à la philosophie de saint Thomas d'Aquin*. The volume now contained 532 pages. This was followed by a fifth edition in 1944. This edition was put into English by Laurence K. Shook with the title: *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, to which was added a catalogue of the works of St. Thomas by Ignatius T. Eschmann. This translation was published in New York by Random House in 1956, with reprint editions by Octagon Books in 1983 and by the University of Notre Dame Press in 1994. The sixth edition, which is translated here for the first time, was published in Paris by Vrin in 1965. It marks the culmination of Gilson's long effort to present succinctly and comprehensively the philosophical thought of Thomas Aquinas.

On no other of his books did Gilson lavish such care and attention. This was his *chef d'oeuvre*, and it demanded a constant updating as he probed more deeply into the thought of his beloved philosopher. As new editions appeared, older interpretations were discarded, out-of-date controversies were suppressed, new insights were gained and incorporated into the ever-enlarged versions. The

<sup>1</sup>For more details of these editions, along with translations and reviews, see Margaret McGrath, *Etienne Gilson. A Bibliography* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1982), pp. 26–27.

<sup>2</sup>Laurence K. Shook, *Etienne Gilson* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), pp. 60–62.

<sup>3</sup>Quoted by Romain Rolland, *Compagnons de route* (Geneva: Editio-Service, 1972), p. 284.

language of Thomas Aquinas in its French expression was refined and sometimes corrected. In the final edition the order of the chapters in the editions prior to the fifth was restored.

As Gilson says in his Preface to the sixth edition, he thought of his book as an historical introduction to Thomas' philosophy, which he wrote for his students and for himself as well. He found it a convenient place to document his developing understanding of the Angelic Doctor. He was under no illusion that it was the final word on the subject. He recognized that an historian could probably never fully fathom the mind of a great genius like Aquinas, and hence the need for modesty in setting forth his own interpretation of Aquinas and indulgence for those of others. In the same Preface he repeats his own controversial position that, while Thomas' philosophy is contained in his theology as its handmaiden and is therefore essentially theological, it is nevertheless a "strictly rational philosophy." The justification of this paradox appears in the pages that follow.

It will be noted that none of the titles Gilson gave to the six editions of his work contains the qualification of "Christian." They simply announce an introduction to Aquinas' philosophy (or system). The title *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* appears only in Laurence Shook's translation of the fifth edition. If my memory is exact, this title was suggested to Gilson by his friend and colleague Anton Pegis. Gilson accepted it, for he was profoundly aware of the Christian influence on Thomas' philosophy and he thought it appropriate for English-speaking readers. But he avoided it in the title of the French editions of his work, perhaps because of the controversy over the notion of Christian philosophy that raged on the continent throughout the early twentieth century and beyond, and because of the misunderstanding of his views on the subject that the controversy occasioned. More decisively, he explains in the Introduction to the sixth edition that, since Thomas himself did not use the expression "Christian Philosophy," it is preferable not to bring it into a purely historical account of Thomism.<sup>4</sup> Our own translation of the sixth edition avoids the term and is in this faithful to the title of the French original.

When the sixth edition of *Le Thomisme* was published in 1965, Fr. Shook realized that his work as translator was not complete. Here was a new version of *Le Thomisme* that in important respects modified and occasionally corrected the earlier version. English readers should not be satisfied with Gilson's views on Thomism contained in the fifth edition; they should have available the more recent expression of his views in the sixth. So Fr. Shook set about translating that edition with the secretarial assistance of Donal Murnaghan, for many years his personal physician and friend. Fr. Shook wrote out his translation longhand, using whenever appropriate his previous translation of the fifth edition, but improving and correcting it. He then passed on his handwritten pages to Dr. Murnaghan, who recorded them, first on typewriter and later on disk, and returned them for Fr. Shook to check.

<sup>4</sup>See Gilson's Introduction to the present work, p. 6.

This collaboration continued until they reached Chapter One of Part 3. Failing health then forced Fr. Shook to give up the project.

Before his death Fr. Shook assured Dr. Murnaghan that someone would continue their work and bring it to completion. Indeed, he knew that I would gladly step in and do this. I inherited all of Fr. Shook's work, and with the continued help of the good doctor finished the project. I was not content simply to translate the part of *Le Thomisme* Fr. Shook left untranslated. For the sake of consistency and uniformity of style, I began at the beginning and reviewed the translation of the whole book. Thus the translation is substantially the work of Fr. Shook, with myself acting as his editor and continuator.

What is new in the sixth edition of *Le Thomisme* that makes it worthy of translation? In his new preface written for this last edition, Gilson explains that, although substantially the same as the fifth, it adds to that edition his more recent reflections on the meaning of Aquinas' philosophy; for example, on the proofs of the existence of God, the meaning of *esse*, and the strict rationality of Thomistic philosophy and its relation to theology. These new insights are to be found chiefly in the first part of the book; for example, in the Introduction, which adds a new section on the philosopher and believer, and in the rearrangement of material on Thomas' meaning of *esse* and the divine being (*Haec sublimis veritas*), and on the Thomistic reform ("A New Theology," "A New Ontology"). Besides changes and restructuring in Part One of the new version, the reader will find throughout the book deletions of material in the former version and additions of words, sentences, and sometimes whole paragraphs, which add precision and clarity to Gilson's exposition of the philosophy of Aquinas. For example, he has largely rewritten the section on the meaning of the proofs of the existence of God (Part 1, ch. 2.6). He has retracted his former opinions that the proof by motion is a proof by the efficient cause of motion (p. 79, n. 80), and that the *De ente et essentia* contains a proof of God's existence (p. 83, n. 85). Thus, while remaining substantially the same as the fifth edition, the sixth offers the reader significant new clarifications of Gilson's views on the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas. In many ways it is his last word on the subject.

In the footnotes I have added a number of editions that have appeared since those Gilson cited—for example, the recent Leonine editions of St. Thomas and the CCL editions of St. Augustine. I have put these references in square brackets. I have also put in square brackets the paragraph numbers of the paragraphs in the manual Leonine edition of the *Summa contra Gentiles*, published in 1934, following the example of Anton Pegis and his colleagues, who translated the work under the title *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*. Also bracketed are several comments and references I have taken the liberty to add in the notes. In rare cases when a completely new footnote has been added, I have used an asterisk in order to retain the footnote numbering of the original. In Part One, Chapter Three, however, the footnotes range consecutively from 1 to 157, in place of 1–99 and 1–58 of the original.

In Fr. Shook's translation of the fifth edition of *Le Thomisme* there are some additional notes and a significant change in Gilson's interpretation of Boethius' notion of being that do not appear in the French volume.<sup>5</sup> I can only surmise that Gilson himself instructed Fr. Shook to make these additions. It should be noted that Gilson also gave Edward Bullough additions to be inserted in his translation of the third edition.<sup>6</sup> Curiously, Gilson did not carry over to his sixth edition these changes he introduced into Fr. Shook's translation. I have taken account of them here in square brackets.

Gilson's personal copy of Fr. Shook's translation of the fifth edition is retained in Toronto in the Rare Book Room of the Library of the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies. Gilson carefully checked this English version and recorded numerous mistakes in translation and other faults in printing. Admitting that he himself may be wrong in his corrections, he begs forgiveness: "sit venia pro peccatis." Every care has been taken to eliminate mistranslations and misprints in this translation of the sixth edition. Like Gilson, however, I must ask the reader's pardon for any failures in this regard.

Some of the translations of quotations from Latin writers were made by Shook from Gilson's French translations, not from the Latin originals. Biblical quotations are from the *Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*, except when modified to fit the context.

It remains to thank my colleagues and friends who assisted in making and publishing this translation. First of all, I am grateful to Dr. Donal Murnaghan, who over the years collaborated with Fr. Shook and then with myself, by putting the translation on disks and printing them, all the while keeping his eye open for occasional misspellings and other happenstances. It is difficult to give adequate thanks to James K. Farge for his generous computer and editorial help. I am grateful to the editor, Jean Hoff, who meticulously prepared the manuscript for publication. I would also like to express my gratitude to Edouard Jeuneau, Jeanette Jardine, and Caroline Suma for their assistance.

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<sup>5</sup>For Gilson's interpretation of Boethius see pp. 91-93, and Appendix 1.

<sup>6</sup>Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas*, trans. E. Bullough (Cambridge: Heffer, 1929), p. xi.