

The Metaphysics of Providence:
Aquinas's Natural Theology in
Summa contra gentiles III

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Editor's Introduction

This issue of *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* is atypical in that it contains a single work by a single philosopher and scholar. Norman Kretzmann, the author of the work here presented, was one of the founders of this journal and served as the chair of its editorial board from the journal's inception until his untimely death in 1998. His intimate association with *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* and his dedication to its mission makes the journal an entirely appropriate vehicle for the publication of the work that filled the last year of his life.

In 1991, at the time he was first diagnosed with an incurable cancer, Norman was preparing to embark on an ambitious research project. He planned to explicate and to critically assess and develop what he saw as the rich and promising systematic metaphysical foundation for theism presented by Thomas Aquinas in *Summa contra gentiles*. As the project took shape, Norman envisioned writing three books, a trilogy whose volumes would be devoted, respectively, to Books I–III of SCG. Undaunted by a forbidding prognosis from his doctors and the sometimes debilitating effects of his cancer and the treatment of it, Norman worked with enormous passion, energy, and focus. He delivered the core of the material of the first book as the Wilde Lectures in Comparative and Natural Religion at Oxford in 1994. The first book itself, *The Metaphysics of Theism: Aquinas's Natural Theology in Summa contra gentiles I*, was published in 1997 by Oxford's Clarendon Press. Norman finished the trilogy's second volume, *The Metaphysics of Creation: Aquinas's Natural Theology in Summa contra gentiles II*, shortly after the appearance of the first. Page proofs for the second volume arrived during the summer of 1998, but Norman was at that time unable to take up the task of proofreading. He never saw the book itself, which appeared with the Clarendon Press in 1999.

Norman had finished drafts of four chapters of the third volume and had begun work on the fifth chapter when, in June 1998, his illness finally brought an end to his writing. The third book was to have been titled *The Metaphysics of Providence: Aquinas's Natural Theology in Summa contra gentiles III*. The material published here under that title comprises the finished part of that unfinished book.

It is impossible to say what the remainder of *The Metaphysics of Providence* would have looked like had Norman been able to complete it. He was not working with any sort of outline in mind other than the general outline provided by the structure of SCG III itself. His procedure was to work at each chapter of Aquinas's text in order, developing extraordinarily detailed

paragraph-by-paragraph, sometimes line-by-line, commentary and analysis. Only after that kind of painstaking preliminary work would he select the particular themes and arguments he wanted to give narrative, chapter-length treatment to. The four chapters presented here demonstrate the results of that procedure as applied to the first 24 of the 163 chapters of SCG III. Not even Norman himself could have said in any detail what the focus or content of the unwritten chapters would be. Those things would have emerged for him as he crawled through the remainder of SCG III in his characteristically thorough fashion.

This way of constructing a book manuscript had the consequence that Norman's early "finished" chapters in fact remained works in progress, subject to ongoing revision in light of the results of later chapters. Readers of these four chapters therefore should bear in mind that they reflect Norman's thought at a point considerably short of that at which he himself would have considered it settled. Had he lived to finish the project, readers of the book would have had before them recognizable but perhaps somewhat distant descendants of these chapters.

Norman would surely have considered these chapters still unfinished for another reason. He habitually shared his ideas and work in progress with a large group of friends and colleagues, valued their comments and suggestions, and meticulously revised his manuscripts, typically several times, to take account of what he learned from them. None of these chapters was shared as widely as Norman would have done had the project progressed further. Hence, none has profited fully from the sort of criticism Norman routinely solicited and relied extensively on. He had revised chapters 1 through 3 once, in light of comments from a few of his closest colleagues. The manuscripts show that the last revisions were completed in late May and early June of 1998. Chapter 4 is essentially a first draft; he had received comments on it from a few colleagues but never managed to incorporate into his text any of the changes they might have prompted. In normal circumstances Norman would not have dreamt of allowing these manuscripts to be published in their present form. As things are, we are grateful to have them and to be able to publish this record of his developing reflections on Aquinas's project in SCG III.

Finally, Norman would have regretted the publication of any work of his that did not acknowledge in detail his reliance on and devotion to his friends and colleagues. Unfortunately, it is impossible for me to do here anything like what he himself would have done in that regard. Norman discussed his work regularly with me and showed me all these chapters. He sought and trusted the advice and philosophical judgment of Eleonore Stump more than that of any other philosophical colleague. She provided him detailed comments on all this material. Beyond that I do not know who contributed directly to Norman's thinking about these chapters or in what ways. He would be grieved that those contributions have gone out into the world unidentified and unacknowledged. I trust that his generosity toward

and affection for his friends in life and his own private expressions of gratitude to them can, for each of the unknown contributors to this part of Norman's work, stand in place of the public acknowledgements he was unable to make.

None of us who understood the nature of the diagnosis Norman received in 1991 thought it at all likely that he would have enough time to advance as far as the third volume of the plan he was then only beginning to pursue. Those of us who knew him well consider it a great gift that he was with us for as many as seven more years. That he was able in those years nearly to complete his work on Aquinas's natural theology in *Summa contra gentiles* is a gift to all who care about the advancement of our understanding and appreciation of medieval philosophy and theology.

—Scott MacDonald

