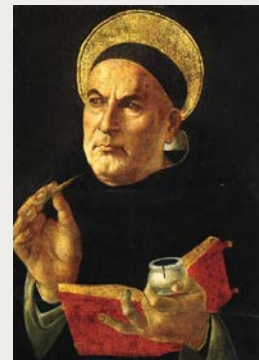


THE "BROAD VISION" UNITING THEOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY, AND SCIENCE

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Almost a century and a half after Pope Leo XIII's promulgation of *Aeterni Patris*, the Church, in her continued vigilance over the study of philosophy, maintains his same vision of both the autonomy and inherent unity present in the relationship between science, philosophy, and theology. Addressing the need for reform of ecclesiastical philosophical studies, the Congregation for Catholic Education calls upon philosophy to "take up the challenge of exercising, developing and defending a rationality with 'broader horizons,' showing that 'it again becomes possible [. . .] to link theology, philosophy and science.'"¹ In our segmented and over-specialized modern world, the "broader vision" of which the Magisterium speaks is one that many of the ancient and medieval philosophers clearly understood: if reason and faith are both given from God, they cannot contradict each other.² Thus, these three disciplines which today tend to be deeply divided are such because they are often not done from a gaze fixed on the truth that God is both the author of reason and the essence of faith and mystery. Let us now turn to each of these disciplines, examining their nature and relationship in this light.



As Fr. Mullady teaches, theology, philosophy, and science should ideally function as a unity. Each is a science in its own right, possessing a unique subject matter that determines its methods.³ Science deals with "those areas of human thought which are limited to the investigation of sense knowledge alone;"⁴ philosophy deals with knowledge of the ultimate causes of everything that exists as explained by reason alone; and theology, the study of God, is a science in the sense that it begins with its own principles known by revealed truth and logically derives conclusions from them.⁵ Philosophy, therefore, is not the foundation of theology; as Fr. Mullady teaches, Christ, faith, revelation, and grace are. He writes, "[theological knowledge] is the most important knowledge [. . .and] because we have a human mind which receives this treasure, human logic and reasoning help us explain what we believe and show it is not absurd."⁶ Thus, authentic philosophy (along with science, as Blessed John Paul II contends) can help to close the gap between faith and reason.⁷

The rejection of metaphysical thought in the 17th century was a turning point in the relationship between these three disciplines, creating a great divide especially between science and philosophy. Abandoning ultimate causes beyond the bounds of sense experience, science became limited to what can be verified empirically by sense knowledge alone. Furthermore, a proper metaphysics, which truly captures the "sapiential dimension"⁸ of the philosopher's quest for the ultimate meaning of everything, has also been compromised by modern philosophy, further dividing theology and philosophy. For this reason, classical philosophy, which begins with belief in (and not denial of) commonly held truths about existence, harmoniously unites these three disciplines without diminishing one at the expense of another. This we can see in the example of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Believing that faith and reason could not contradict each other since both come from God, St. Thomas was able to distinguish that there are two kinds of truth in theology: those which remain open to the investigation of reason alone, and those for which faith is absolutely necessary. He contended that, while abstraction through the senses is the natural way that man knows in this world, knowledge by illumination (how the blessed know in heaven) can also take place in the soul.⁹ This broad philosophical vision, which acknowledged the validity of science and philosophy, helped St. Thomas to resolve the suspicion with which Aristotle was viewed for some of his teachings affecting theology and the life of faith. For example, Aristotle posited the eternity of the world, which obviously stands against the Church's teaching that God created the world *ex nihilo* in time. St. Thomas acknowledged that this belief of faith was true, yet it could not be demonstrated by reason alone. Therefore, one could just as rightly hold for the eternity of the world as a logical possibility.¹⁰ He arrived at this great conclusion from the "bottom up"—that is, believing certain basic truths about the world and proceeding in a rational and philosophical way up to this more universal understanding, calling upon theological truth and scientific matter to aid in this process.

The simple unity of God who is both the author of reason and the essence of faith and mystery is the safeguard of authentic knowledge. As St. Thomas shows us, in order to be what it is, authentic knowledge can never neglect even the most basic of truths—both revealed and those arrived at through the senses—about God, man, and the world. When undertaken from this point of view, the disciplines of theology, philosophy, and science can work together harmoniously to achieve the broad vision proposed by our Holy Fathers and the Magisterium of the Church.

¹ Congregation for Catholic Education, *Decree on the Reform of Ecclesiastical Studies of Philosophy*, (28 January 2011), §7, at The Holy See, www.vatican.va.

² Fr. Brian Mullady, O.P., class notes on *Philosophy for Theologians*, (Cromwell, CT: Holy Apostles College & Seminary, distributed 27 August 2012).

³ Mullady, notes, (27 August 2012).

⁴ Mullady, notes, (27 August 2012).

⁵ Mullady, notes, Lesson Three.

⁶ Fr. Brian Mullady, O.P., to philosophy students, "My reaction to discussion posts," personal email (23 September 2012).

⁷ Mullady, notes, (27 August 2012).

⁸ Mullady, notes, (27 August 2012). See John Paul II, Encyclical on the Relationship of Faith and Reason *Fides et Ratio* (14 September 1998), § 81.

⁹ Mullady, notes, (27 August 2012).

¹⁰ Mullady, notes, (27 August 2012).

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