

AQUINAS' PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE OF PHILOSOPHY

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Down through the ages different philosophers, whatever their other disagreements, have insisted that the philosophic life is the best human life. As philosophers, they equate happiness with wisdom, the comprehensive account of the whole of reality in light of its first principles and causes. In his *Expositio super librum Boethii de trinitate*, Thomas Aquinas denies this teaching. He asserts, rather, that philosophy can know with absolute certainty that it cannot attain such wisdom and thus that it cannot be the best life. More precisely, Thomas argues that the limited abstracting power of the agent intellect precludes in principle the very possibility of a *quod est* knowledge of the First Principle of the whole; human beings must resign themselves to a mere *quia* knowledge of it at best. On the other hand, the philosophers are right to identify happiness with wisdom; but the very impossibility of attaining that wisdom negates the claims that philosophy provides the best and happy life. Thomas, in short, turns the philosophers own arguments against themselves. He discovers the roots of the philosophers erroneous account of the best life in their now disproved assumption that the human mind is commensurate with reality itself.

In his *Expositio super librum Boethii de Trinitate*¹ (hereafter Exposition) Thomas Aquinas takes up the question of the best human life first

¹ All references to this work are to Bruno Decker (ed.), *Sancti Thomae de Aquino, Expositio super librum Boethii de Trinitate*, E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1965. A two volume English translation of this book has been published by Armand Maurer (ed.) *Faith, reason, and theology* and *The division and method of the sciences*, Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, Toronto, 1986–1987. The first volume translates Questions I–IV, the second V and VI. I will generally cite the Maurer translation, though I will make my own translations when I need greater precision. Two fairly recent commentaries on Aquinas text are by Leo Elders, *Faith and science*, Herder, Roma, 1974, and Douglas C. Hall, *The Trin-*

raised by Socrates more than a millennium and a half earlier. Is it philosophy or is it religion that provides the proper guidance for and supreme perfection of human beings? Socrates emphatically affirms philosophy for it is the life according to nature, while religion is merely political and conventional. At its best, religion is a “noble lie” useful for politically governing the unphilosophic multitude; usually, however, it is the city’s ignoble lie which forms foolish fanatics like Euthyphro and Miletus. Plato’s Socrates is committed not so much to his particular philosophical teachings (e.g., the “Ideas”) as he is to philosophic inquiry itself: he is a lover of wisdom rather than wise; he knows that he does not know. But what he *does* know is that his way of life is best. Plato’s student Aristotle develops his own line of thought, but he is one with his teacher in affirming the supremacy of the philosophic life. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*’ weighing of alternative accounts of the best life, religion is not even mentioned. Down through the ages Socrates’ successors — whether members of the Academy, the Lyceum, the Porch, the Garden, etc. — have stood united on this point, that the philosophic life is the right life.² And it is precisely this teaching that Aquinas puts in the gun sights of his Exposition.

Virtually every major writing by St. Thomas includes a hefty discussion of the relation between philosophy and the Christian faith. His oft stated teaching on the topic is so well known that the briefest summary of it suffices here. Philosophy serves as the “handmaiden” (*ancilla*) to faith by discovering certain truths about reality — e.g., the existence and unity of God — which constitute the *praeambula Fidei*, by showing that arguments against the faith are either false or lacking in necessity, and by equipping the Faith with analogies to make it more intelligible to us.³

ity E. J. Brill, Leiden, 1992. Elders’ book is especially strong on the background of the book, while Hall sees the text as developing St. Thomas’ theological methodology. Ralph McInerny, *Boethius and Aquinas*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C., 1990, devotes three substantial chapters to St. Thomas’ commentary, but he concentrates on the metaphysics of the final two Questions rather than on the whole work. I will cite the work using Roman numerals for Aquinas’ Questions and Arabic numerals for the Articles. Unless otherwise indicated, all references are to this book by St. Thomas.

² See Pierre Hadot, *What is ancient philosophy?*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2001; J. Domanski, *La philosophie: Théorie ou manière de vivre?* Cerf, Paris, 1996; Leo Strauss, ‘The mutual influence of theology and philosophy’, *The Independent Journal of Philosophy* 3, 1979, pp. 111–118.

³ See *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 1–9 and the *Summa Theologiae* I, Q1. A small compendium of Aquinas texts on this question has been compiled by Stephen F. Brown,

Such an understanding did not impress the thirteenth century successors of Socrates, the Averroistic Aristotelians on the Sorbonne Arts Faculty.⁴ Aquinas' "handmaiden" solution subordinates philosophy to faith, and so it assumes the very thing that it needs to prove — that the Christian faith offers a better guide for human life and a truer account of reality than that which reason can discover for itself. It begs the question, moreover, to say that Aquinas is a Christian believer and therefore that he holds faith is superior to philosophy: it is the very status of faith itself that the philosopher calls into question. From the standpoint of human reason, Aquinas' "handmaiden" teaching is utterly arbitrary, if not simply irrational. Boethius of Dacia, expressing the mind of the Averroistic Artists, sums up the case for philosophy being the best life as follows.

Among the operations of the intellective power, there is one that is best and most perfect, [and] all others naturally exist for its sake. When a man performs such an operation, he enjoys the highest possible state for man. Such men are the philosophers, who spend their lives in the pursuit of wisdom [...]. Since the philosopher has the greatest love for the first principle, as has been indicated, it follows that the philosopher

Aquinas: on faith and reason, Hackett, Indianapolis, 1999. Brown includes a working bibliography on the question in his volume. In the Exposition, the three uses of philosophy in Faith are discussed at II, 3 *resp.*

⁴ On the conflicts between the University of Paris Artists and Theologians, and indeed for discussions of the wider historical setting of Thomas' work, see the following: David Knowles, *The evolution of medieval thought*, Longman, London, 1988², pp. 201–251; John Marenborn, *Later Medieval philosophy*, Routledge, London, 1993, pp. 66–82; Jan Aertsen, Aquinas's philosophy in its historical setting, in Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump (eds.), *The Cambridge companion to Aquinas*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 12–37. Older but still valuable treatments of these issues will be found in Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian philosophy in the Middle Ages* Random House, New York, 1955, pp. 244–250; 387–410; Fernand van Steenberghen, *La philosophie au XII^e siècle*, Publications Universitaires, Louvain, 1966, pp. 72–189; 357–493; and still indispensable is M-D. Chenu, *Toward understanding Saint Thomas*, Regnery, Chicago, 1964, pp. 11–199. Since I am reproducing the historical situation as *Thomas saw it*, there is no need for me to enter the debates initiated by Gilson and van Steenberghen on the "Averroism" or "Aristotélisme hétérodoxe" of the Artists. The point at issue is that *Thomas* understood the Artists to be "Averroists", as is evident from his *De Unitate Intellectus Contra Averroistas*. Despite his other disagreements with Thomas, Bonaventure shared his belief about the Artists. On the issue of faith and reason in the middle ages, see the studies collected in Jan Aertsen and Andreas Speer (eds.), *Was ist Philosophie in Mittelalter?* (*Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 26), 1998, in addition to the bibliography gathered by Stephen Brown in the volume cited in the previous note. A study which reaches conclusions similar to my own is Jan Aertsen, 'Mittelalterliche Philosophie: ein unmögliches Projekt?', in *Geistleben im 13. Jahrhundert* (*Miscellanea Mediaevalia* 27), 1999, pp. 12–28.

takes maximum delight in this first principle and in contemplating its goodness, and that this alone is right pleasure. This is the life of the philosopher. Whoever does not live such a life does not live rightly.⁵

As his celebrated disputes with the Averroists bear witness, St. Thomas was not ignorant of the case that could be mounted against him. He well knew that he had to justify his subordination of philosophy to the Christian faith. How, then, to render his teaching non-arbitrary? To put the question more radically, why did Aquinas himself not accept the arguments for philosophy's supremacy, and subordinate the Christian faith to it? In this paper I can address only one aspect of that question. I will use the Exposition as my principal source since he wrote it to address this particular issue.⁶ A central contention of Aquinas in the Exposition, I will argue, is that unaided human reason operating by its own purely natural powers can discover for itself that philosophy *in principle* is incapable of attaining the wisdom to which it aspires, i.e., the comprehensive account of the whole of reality in light of essential knowledge of the "first principle"; accordingly, in principle it cannot be the right way of life or provide ultimate happiness. In executing this program, I will show that Thomas argues his case on *purely* philosophical grounds: not one premise or conclusion of his argument depends on his Christian faith. In sum, I intend to show that Aquinas rejects philosophy's claim to supremacy over the Christian faith on completely rational grounds, grounds that the Artists themselves accept.

In juxtaposing the *philosophi* ascent to God from creatures with the *theologi* descent from the First Truth to creatures in his Prologue (I, 4–7), Aquinas proleptically anticipates the conflict between the two claimants for the best life. As the argument of the Exposition unfolds, Thomas' philosophers assert both that philosophy is right and that faith is wrong. They affirm philosophy on grounds expressed primar-

⁵ Boethius of Dacia, 'Oh the Supreme Good, or on the Life of the Philosopher', in John F. Wippel and Allan B. Wolter, *Medieval philosophy*, The Free Press, New York, 1969, pp. 373–375.

⁶ I cannot develop this point within the limited scope of this paper, but I shall merely assert my conviction that the Exposition is Thomas' one and only writing explicitly devoted to the problem of "faith and reason." While he repeatedly expresses his views on this question in his other writings, e.g., the two *Summae*, the question itself is thematically addressed *as a question* only in this book. For a like reason, I believe that St. Thomas completed what he wanted to say on the topic. That is, he decided not to proceed with his *lectiones* and *quaestiones* on the trinitarian part of Boethius' work. As it stands, the Exposition is complete. While arguing these points is not possible here, I hope the reason for my choosing the Exposition as my main source is clear.

ily, though not exclusively, in the Objections of Question VI, article 4. First, philosophy's quest is for wisdom, the essential knowledge of the first principle or separated substance in light of which a comprehensive account of the whole of reality may be scientifically demonstrated. All other sciences and inquiries are ordered to and by the highest study: *sapientis est ordinare* (V, 1 *obj.* 1; Prol. I, 5–7; II, 2 *ad* 1). Secondly, since all knowledge is acquired from the form, *scientia divina* is science precisely because by it the divine form is beheld (VI, 4 *obj.* 2). Thirdly, happiness (*felicitas*) is an act of wisdom which itself is the most perfect operation of the best power, the intellect, about the best reality, the separated substances. Accordingly happiness is the fruition of wisdom's understanding of the separated substances (VI, 4 *obj.* 3). Happiness, moreover, is the end or goal of life, that to which one's entire life is ordered; it is the fulfillment of our natural desire. As Augustine says, the philosophic enterprise is undertaken in order to be happy (V, 1 *ad* 4). Fourthly, if the speculative science of divinity cannot attain knowledge of the separated substances, it fails to reach its end — and that is absurd (VI, 4 *obj.* 4). Finally, human nature itself is inclined to know the separated substances as its ultimate end. But to have such a natural inclination or desire implies that we have the principles within us to accomplish it (VI, 4 *obj.* 5); as Aristotle had said, no natural desire is vain.

The human being by nature, then, reaches perfection and happiness through the speculative quest for and attainment of wisdom. The philosophers' claim for philosophy, accordingly, is that it is the ordering principle of the best life. Philosophy, as philosophers understand it, is the quest for wisdom understood in terms of science as Aristotle develops it in the *Posterior Analytics*. Such true knowledge is universal, necessary, causal, demonstrative, through a middle term, and derived from premises that are better known than the conclusions. In any science these criteria obtain, but in Wisdom the first principles of the whole of reality, grasped by noetic insight (*nous, intellectus*) or the "understanding of principles," secure the principles that the other sciences either assume or do not need in their more limited demonstrations. Thomas' philosopher, then, does not limit the intellect's reach to sensible phenomena; his philosopher proudly proclaims that wisdom is attainable, that the search for and discovery of it lies at the core of the best and happy life.

In his programmatic Question I Aquinas not only sketches the scope and limits of the intellect's power, but also he sets forth agenda

for the rest of the book. Reason is capable of knowing some truths (a.1), and it can even reach to an analogical, *quia* knowledge of God (a.2), but such knowledge is posterior to the knowledge of sensible realities (a.3); in no way can the mind by its own natural light arise even to the *quia* much less the *quod est* knowledge of the True God (a.4). Not only is natural knowledge dependent on the sensible body, but also reason itself fully knows this fact. As the mind knows intelligible realities which the agent intellect abstracts from sensed particulars, by remotion from effect to cause, the mind comes to know not only the existence of separated substances, but also that, by its own light, it is powerless to know their essences. Questions IV through VI will develop these points on which Question I merely touches; Questions II and III will argue that the Christian Faith and Religion provide the knowledge and way of life that philosophy cannot supply. In short, Question I sets the agenda for the entire Exposition.

In Question V Thomas takes up the problem of true knowledge (*scientia*). While his solution had been sketched in the programmatic Question I, here he fully argues his answer. By virtue of the natural light of the agent intellect true knowledge can be gathered from the flux of sense experiences. True knowledge however, is characterized by intelligible necessity and thus excludes the mutable or changeable; what can be other than it is cannot be “necessary” (V, 1). As *scientia* is characterized by necessity, the different habits of science perfect the intellect according to the different kinds of necessity that specify the objects of each science. Thus matter and form belong by necessity to physical, mobile bodies. Physics, accordingly, is the habit of science by which the intellect understands what can neither exist, nor be understood, apart from matter and motion. By abstracting the universal, either “with precision” or *sine praecisione*, from the designated matter of the sensed particular (e.g., “humanity” or “man” from Socrates), the mind grasps that which is necessary and unchanging in and from an ever-changing contingent body (V, 2; cf. *De ente et essentia*, ch. II). In a similar way, mathematics is the science by which the mind comprehends what exists in sensible matter but which is understood without such matter; this refers, of course, to the primary accident, quantity. The natural light of the agent intellect abstracts the intelligible form from the sensible matter (circle from the bronze shield), and so understands the intelligible object apart from such matter (V, 3).

Besides performing apprehensive abstractions by the agent intellect, the mind also judges by composing and dividing (V, 3). In phys-

ics and mathematics such judgments terminate in the mind's essential, *propter quid* knowledge of things. "The earth is a sphere" is a scientifically demonstrated conclusion from better known premises in both sciences, the mean of demonstration being proper to each (V, 3 *ad* 7). And though the sphericity of the earth is not evident to the naked eye—if anything it appears to be flat—the respective physical and mathematical premises through which this is known are fully intelligible to the power of the natural light. Such, unfortunately, is not the case in metaphysics. First philosophy or (philosophical) theology is the science which knows by the judgment of separation those realities which are "separated" from matter: either they do not exist in it (i.e., separated substances) or they are not dependent upon it—e.g., *esse-essentia*, act-potency, etc. (V, 1 *obj.* 7 and V, 4 *resp. ad fin.*). The opposite, rather, is the case: physical, mobile bodies depend upon these realities. As the separated substances are not limited either by matter-form composition or by sensible accidents rooted in signate matter, the abstracting power of the natural light is insufficient to reveal their essences. Such realities are known and judged by the mind not in themselves, but only insofar as they are principles of all beings, known by remotion from the posterior composites (V, 4). First philosophy, then, perfects the mind by rising from effects to the Cause who is the principle of all sensible beings; it knows Him insofar and only insofar as such effects manifest Him as their cause. Metaphysics differs from physics in that the latter knows the essential causes of physical, mobile beings (e.g., the earth's sphericity), while the former is unable to grasp the essence of any separated substance precisely because it far transcends the limited light of the agent intellect (V, 4). The three sciences of physics, mathematics, and metaphysics, then, perfect the human intellect in diverse ways: by the first habit the "inseparable" from matter is known; by the second the "separable" is understood; by the third the "separate" is neither known nor understood as it is, but it merely is affirmed. The human mind at its zenith, perfected by the science of first philosophy, both knows that the First Cause exists and knows that its essence is utterly unknowable to it (VI, 3 and 4).

Thomas' analysis of the mind's power to know is intended to establish both the legitimacy of philosophy and its limits. The three scientific habits are rooted in the natural light of the mind, not in the Divine Light. As such they are sciences, properly speaking, for each is specified by its formal objects, is characterized by intelligible necessity, and follows its own methods (VI, 1). By these habits the human

mind comes to true knowledge, *scientia* either *propter quid* or *quia*. In no way does the Light of Divine Revelation enter into these sciences; such Light is not a principle constitutive of any of them. In short, the philosophical sciences differ not only in species but in genus from any revealed theology.

The further significance of Thomas' achievement becomes apparent from the very fact that he has established the independence of the philosophical sciences: these are theoretical sciences and *only* theoretical sciences. By showing that a *propter quid* knowledge of the First Principle is impossible, Thomas denies the central claim of pre-modern philosophy — that it is the right way of life because it is devoted to the quest for wisdom (see above). On Thomas' showing philosophy *cannot* be the right way of life because it is *intrinsically* incapable of attaining the very knowledge which would make for happiness. Thomas, of course, does not deny that happiness consists in the knowledge of the first principle. To the contrary we have a "natural desire" for such knowledge (VI, 4 *ad* 4), and our perfection is to be united to God by knowledge (II, 1 *co*).⁷ But the knowledge of the "separated substance" that metaphysics can attain is merely that of the negative judgment of separation: it is a *quia* knowledge, analogical, and more negative than positive. The truth that metaphysical science reaches is the truth that the *propter quid* knowledge of God that we would need to attain happiness is not available to our limited light. The whole argument of Q. VI, a. 4 is to show that no theoretical science attains to knowledge of the "divine form"; as the effects do not begin to reveal the Divine Essence, we far more know our ignorance of the separated substances than we know them.

In a curious way, then, St. Thomas winds up with an understanding of philosophy that is semi-Socratic: philosophy is knowledge of its own ignorance. In the words of Leo Strauss, philosophy is both "aware of the whole" and aware of its failure to account for the whole.⁸ For philosophy to become wisdom the natural light would have to be able to reveal the Divine Essence as it is; and this it both cannot do and, most importantly, *knows* with "intelligible necessity" that it cannot. Unlike Socrates (and Strauss), however, Thomas concludes that philosophy's necessary inability to become wisdom means that it can-

⁷ See Henri de Lubac, *The mystery of the supernatural*, Herder and Herder, New York, 1967, chapter 10 especially, for St. Thomas' understanding of man's natural desire for seeing God.

⁸ Leo Strauss, *art. cit.*, 114.

not possibly supply the best life.⁹ In sum, human reason through the theoretical sciences knows proportionate intelligible objects, i.e., bodily beings, and them alone with *propter quid* knowledge.

Although the agent intellects abstractive power cannot reach far enough to illuminate the mind's ignorance of the "divine form", an analogical knowledge of God and some of His attributes is available. The mind which knows nothing of God in Himself can form judgments expressed in propositions about God. As Pure Act, He is both the absolute knower and the absolutely knowable (I, 3 *resp.*; I, 4 *ad* 6). Passive potency impedes understanding, whether it be on the part of knower or the object to be known, or both. Thus whatever is known is understood through its form or essential act. Conversely, prime matter as pure passive potency is unknowable in itself and known only through its act, substantial form. Similarly the mind's passive potency, the potential intellect, is brought to knowledge only by the agent intellect's abstractive acts which render the potentially intelligible sensible substance actually so. Without any trace of passive potency, Pure Act is *noesis noeseos* or absolute Self Understanding. In knowing Himself He knows Himself precisely as the *causa essendi* of all beings and the ways in which the diverse and multiple beings may act (cf. II, 2 *resp.*; *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 47–50). Moreover, as the First Cause of human beings, beings who have the "natural desire" to know the Divine Essence with *propter quid* knowledge, He knows Himself as the ultimate felicity of man (*ibid.* III, 17 [7–8]). Finally, man can know that if he is to have perfect happiness, God must make Himself known in a way that transcends the power of the agent intellect (VI, 4 *ad* 5). Human beings, in short know (1) that this natural desire for happiness lies in understanding the First Principle; (2) that such knowledge transcends the illuminative power of the agent intellect or the reach of human mind; (3) that the separated substance will have to be known by some way other than the theoretical sciences for man to fulfill his natural desire. Aquinas develops this last point in a way that turns the philosophers' own very arguments against them.

⁹ "Wisdom" is an analogical term for Aquinas. The wisdom of the metaphysician or philosophical theologian is not the wisdom possessed by the believer in revealed divine science; still less is it the wisdom that is the gift of the Holy Spirit. The "wisdom" of the metaphysician may be real, but it cannot ground happiness since it is a recognition of necessary ignorance rather than the essential knowledge of the First Principle. See Kieran Conley, *A theology of wisdom*, Priory Press, Dubuque, 1963.

Owing to a deficiency on our part, divine and necessary realities which are most knowable by nature, are not apparent to us [...] [S]ince the goal of human life is perfect happiness, which consists in the full knowledge of divine realities, the direction of human life toward perfect happiness from the very beginning requires faith in the divine [...] (III, 1 *resp.*)

It is the philosophers who have taught that happiness consists in the “full knowledge of divine realities.” Thomas agrees. But since reason knows that it cannot attain such knowledge, happiness is impossible unless such knowledge is divinely revealed, received in faith, and fructified in eternity. The most that the philosopher can hope for is a *felicitas imperfecta*. Aquinas, in short, hoists Boethius of Dacia on his own petard; he uses the five objections in favor of philosophy, noted earlier in this paper, to disprove philosophy’s claim to supremacy.

What, then, explains the philosophers exalting the philosophic life? What failure does Aquinas see lying at the root of their conviction that the philosophic life is best? In discussing the three ways in which philosophy can be a “handmaiden” to faith Thomas notes that those using philosophy can err in two ways: by using teachings contrary to the faith, and by “including the contents of faith within the bounds of philosophy, as would happen should somebody decide to believe nothing but what could be established by philosophy” (II, 3 *resp.*). The latter error subsumes the three ways, which he had previously mentioned, in which reason is abused rather than used in exploring divine things: by the presumption which attempts to comprehend God, by the willingness to believe only what reason can discover, and by an individual assuming that his speculative powers are greater than they are (II, 1 *resp.*). Even if the third abuse is relegated to the vice of self-ignorant conceit, the other two abuses bring Thomas to the heart of his critique of the philosophers. The entire case for the supremacy the philosophic life rests on these two foundations — that the mind can comprehend the “first principle” and that the human mind’s power is adequate to know the whole of reality. Indeed, without these two suppositions, the case for the philosophic life simply collapses. Although Socrates knows that he does not know, his dialectic is rooted in the conviction that reality can be known; similarly the other philosophical schools may or may not suffer the conceit that each of them alone is wise, but all maintain wisdom in principle is possible; Boethius of Dacia may or may not be convinced that he himself has comprehended the first principle, but he is convinced that it can be comprehended. In short, “rationalism” — the belief that the human mind is capable of grasping the whole — lies

at the root of the conviction that the philosophic life is best; and it is precisely this rationalistic belief that Thomas has attacked at its root. The Exposition has been designed to show that such a belief is not merely an unproved opinion but a disproved error. If the philosopher becomes convinced that he knows with intelligible necessity that he cannot attain knowledge of the "divine form", but that he attains only a *quia* knowledge of the "first principle", he may well open up to hearing the case for the Christian revelation.

In making his "philosophical critique of philosophy", St. Thomas illustrates one of the ways in which philosophy serves as a handmaiden to faith: by showing that contrary teachings are false or lack necessity. By employing philosophy, he has shown that the philosophic life cannot be the best life, that its claim is rooted in a fundamental philosophical error. It is to be noted that he has made his case on purely philosophical or rational grounds; not a single step in his argument has depended on his belief in the Christian Revelation. He has done this, moreover, precisely by beginning with what the philosophers themselves teach — that knowledge of the first principle or separated substance is the key to wisdom and happiness. In showing that the mind knows that it cannot reach this wisdom, he uses philosophy to open the door for religious faith.

But which one? There are as many religions as there are philosophical schools, maybe more. Here the third use of philosophy becomes important. Not only must a true religion not contradict reason, but also its teachings must be at least "believable." While the human mind cannot attain wisdom, reason of itself can certainly discover folly. Reason cannot validate the claims of the Christian faith, but it can certainly test them for irrationality. Is the Trinity self-contradictory? Is transubstantiation an impossibility? Philosophy can try these beliefs before the bar of reason. In short, Aquinas' critique of Lady philosophy, far from dismissing her, has shaved her head bald (II, 3 *sed c.* 3), and set her on a new foundation as a set of theoretical sciences; she has become a unique handmaiden who has an honored position at the King's right hand.