

Book Review.

The Eternal Quest. By William R. O'Connor. New York, Toronto, London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1947. Pp. 290. \$4.00.

This investigation of "the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas on the natural desire for God," after a preliminary chapter in which apparently conflicting texts are presented, takes and elaborates over/the fourfold classification of opinions worked out by Fr. Brisbois in Nouvelle Revue Théologique, 1936, and then, returning to the text of St. Thomas, develops an interpretation that coincides with none of the four. The author's basic contention turns upon a distinction between desire in the intellect for knowledge and desire in the will for happiness. There is in the intellect a natural desire for the vision of God; for intellectual curiosity is natural to man, so that knowledge of God's existence is followed naturally by a desire to know God's essence or quiddity. But this does not imply in the will any natural desire for the beatific vision: man's will ~~not~~ tends naturally not to any specific beatitude but only to beatitude in general; objectively it is true that knowing quid sit Deus and possessing perfect beatitude are identical; but that objective truth is evident immediately only to those already in possession of the beatific vision; and in them desire is replaced by fruition. Hence, while there is a natural desire for the vision of God, there is no natural desire for the vision of God as beatific.

This account of what St. Thomas said has the splendor of simplicity, accuracy, objectivity and, as well, the merit of not having been said (to my knowledge) before. The author may be congratulated sincerely and warmly. It remains, I think, that exception should be taken to two aspects of the general perspective in which he has placed the foregoing account.

Very strongly he insists that for both Aristotle and Aquinas natural appetite is always "a real and positive movement proceeding from the natural form in the direction of the natural good or end of the object" (p. 106). This real and positive movement is a motus in the strict sense of imperfect act (p. 113). The natural velle of the will towards its end is a motus, not in the broad sense of operation, but in the strict sense of imperfect act (p. 121). Such statements are more than puzzling. Matter has a natural appetite for form. From what form does this movement, natural appetite, proceed? What is moving? To what category does the movement reduce? Again, there is a natural inclination to fall that pertains to a stone at rest in an elevated position. Is this natural inclination a movement? Does it reduce to the category, ubi? Can the same thing be at movement and at rest simultaneously with respect to the same category? No doubt the natural inclination to fall is really distinct from the substantial form of the stone. But it is not interpreting St. Thomas to adduce later speculations on the nature of final causality to prove that the natural inclination of the stone to fall is more than a natural relation of finality in the accidental forma gravitatis.

Finally, with regard to imperfect act, one cannot eat one's cake and keep it. If motus and imperfect act are so taken that only God and the blessed have operation without movement, as in In II Sent., d. 11, q. 2, a. 1, then/willing the means ^{in this life} is just as much an imperfect act as naturally willing the end. If motus and imperfect act are taken as movement from one contrary to another, as determined in the Physics (In III de An., lect. 12 §766), as incompatible with sensation (ibid.), as presupposing an extended and divisible subject (In VI Phys., lect. 12), then no act of will can be an imperfect act.

Though the author does not discuss explicitly the possibility of introducing into Thomist thought the later hypothesis of natura pura, still he cannot avoid this issue entirely and two of his appendices hover about it. He affirms that man's natural beatitude would be a perpetual process of advance in knowledge of God; vision is not to be attained naturally, and so natural desire remains unsatisfied; this is only to be expected, since perfect beatitude is natural only to God, while the beatitude natural to a creature is imperfect; over this imperfection unbaptized infants do not appear to be distressed. To the objection, nihil in natura frustra, he answers that, though this statement is simple, still its meaning is complex: it means that the desires of nature are satisfied, provided there are no impediments; when there are impediments, it means only that the desires of nature would be satisfied if the impediments were removed; the impediment to the satisfaction of natural desire for the vision of God is the "inferiority

of nature," and it is removed by the grace of the light of glory. But might not the objection be pressed? Impediments are per accidens and, in an ordered universe, they occur only in minori parte. Is then grace per se? Is it required by the order of the universe? Against this, one might appeal to the view that there are extinct biological species despite their natural desire for conservation (C. Gent., II, 55, §13). But again one can object, Did Aquinas adjust Aristotle to make provision either for natura pura or for extinct biological species? Or, to come back to Cajetan, is it not unhistorical to attribute to Aquinas' arguments from reason a rigor that at least sometimes they do not possess? In a word I do not think that the author has ~~xxxxxx~~ evaluated the significance of Aquinas' views on natural desire.

In conclusion, the work handles admirably its main issue; it is a valuable fund of information on subsidiary issues, and this fund is made available by an index; there is also a large bibliography; unfortunately, according to a detestable habit of publishers, the foot-notes are consigned in a lump to the end of the book.

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