



Thomism and Analytic Philosophy: The Promises and Perils of Dialogue

14 & 15 March 2023

Aula Minor



ANGELICVM
INSTITUTUM THOMISTICUM

Schedule

Tuesday, March 14

14:00-14:45 | **Mack Sullivan** “What is a Good Argument? The Promise of Analytic Philosophy”

14:45-15:30 | Response and Q&A

15:30-16:00 | Coffee Break

16:00-14:45 | **Sara Bernstein** “Is Analytic Philosophy Neutral?”

16:45-17:30 | Response and Q&A

Wednesday, March 15

14:00-14:45 | **Gaven Kerr** “Re-Enchanting Nature with Aquinas and McDowell”

14:45-15:30 | Response and Q&A

15:30-16:00 | Coffee Break

16:00-14:45 | **Philip-Neri Reese, OP** “Why Do Some Thomists Scoff at Analytic Philosophy?”

16:45-17:30 | Response and Q&A

Speakers and Abstracts

Tuesday, 14 March

14:00 **Mack Sullivan** is a PhD candidate at the University of Notre Dame. He thinks about all kinds of things in philosophy but focus on metaphysics and logic. He is currently writing his dissertation (under Daniel Nolan) on the question of what the *best* package of views are about sentences, propositions, and worlds.

“What is a Good Argument? The Promise of Analytic Philosophy”

This talk is about a simple question: can analytic philosophy help Thomists? I’ll address that question in three parts. First, I’ll offer a conception of what analytic philosophy is. On my view, analytic philosophy is simply logically rigorous philosophy. I won’t try to exhaustively characterize what philosophy is. (That’s another talk.) But I will say that every philosopher (whether Thomist or analytic) ought to be concerned with—among other things—what good arguments are. And I will say that a piece of philosophy is logically rigorous just in case the arguments in the piece could, in principle, be substituted for arguments which live up to the standards of logicians. Second, I’ll suggest a reason (familiar to logicians) why analytic philosophy could help Thomists. The reason is that there are various things which are not good arguments according to (e.g.) the inferential syllogisms from Aristotle or Thomas, but which are good arguments according to the standards of professional logicians, and so by the standards of analytic philosophers. (By ‘good’ here I mean valid; I’ll discuss how I understand that property in the talk.) Since we ought to

trust the professional logicians about which arguments are good arguments, we therefore ought to think that analytic philosophy has better standards for what a good argument is. And since philosophers are concerned with (among other things) good arguments, Thomists ought to care to learn more about analytic philosophy. Or so I'll suggest. And third, I'll address a concern which my audience might have. The concern is that, while analytic philosophers have appealingly precise standards for when an argument is a good argument, we don't need to use those standards when evaluating arguments which matter to Thomists. And I'll answer that objection head on: I'll consider arguments where the judgments of whether they are good by the standards of the inferential syllogisms and the standards of professional logicians differ; and I'll show how these arguments matter to Thomists. So analytic philosophy's standards offer a promise: if Thomists care about deciding whether an argument is good or bad, then analytic philosophers can help them decide.

15:30 Coffee Break

16:00 **Sara Bernstein** is R.L. Canala College Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. She publishes on the metaphysics of causation, causation in the law, the methodology of metaphysics, the metaphysics of time travel, and the metaphysics of feminist theory. Her work has been funded by the National Humanities Center and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

“Is Analytic Philosophy Neutral?”

I suggest that analytic philosophy is a methodologically flexible endeavor. As long as analytic philosophers ask questions about the same subject matter as other sorts of philosophers, analytic philosophers can engage in fruitful dialogue with those on other sides of various methodological and topical divides. I suggest that analytic philosophers’ suspicion of Thomism takes three main forms: mistrust of its foundational tenets, of its methodology, and of some of its practitioners. I discuss ways that a particular sort of methodological flexibility can alleviate this mistrust, and ways that Thomists might also work to bridge the divide.

Wednesday, 15 March

14:00 **Gaven Kerr** is a married father of three and a third order Dominican. His doctoral work was on the thought of St Thomas Aquinas in relation to Immanuel Kant, and his work since then has focused on the thought of Aquinas in relation to contemporary concerns in philosophy. In particular Gaven has worked on Aquinas's metaphysical thought in relation to proofs for God's existence. He has published two monographs with OUP: *Aquinas's Way to God: The Proof in De Ente et Essentia* (2015) and *Aquinas and the Metaphysics of Creation* (2019), as well as a book of collected articles on the existence of God with *Editiones Scholasticae*. Along with these publications, Gaven continues to work and publish on various themes in the thought of Aquinas.

“Re-Enchanting Nature with Aquinas and McDowell”

Modern philosophy envisages a chasm between mind and world. This chasm threatens the intellectual grasp that we

can have on the world, and both the rationalist and empiricist traditions sought to bridge that chasm. What they held in common was the view that perceptual experience adds its own notional distinct kind of content to that of understanding. It was the insight of Kant that perception does not have its own content independent of understanding, so that what is disclosed in intuition is content for thought and so conceptual all the way down. In contemporary analytic philosophy, John McDowell has adopted a post-Kantian way of thinking that envisages conceptuality to push all the way out to perception, and he diagnoses the chasm between mind and world in terms of the disenchantment of nature whereby nature is seen as a realm of law devoid of conceptuality. He seeks to re-enchant nature with a kind of relaxed Platonism. In this paper I argue that McDowell's project bears similarity to Aquinas's thought on mind and world, and that his relaxed Platonism can be accommodated within Aquinas's Aristotelian approach to form as the structuring principle of matter which thereby makes available to intelligence the intelligible or conceptual structure of the real.

15:30 Coffee Break

16:00 **Philip-Neri Reese, O.P.**, is a Dominican friar of the Province of St. Joseph and a Professor of Philosophy at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas (Angelicum) in Rome. He is also the principal investigator for the Angelicum Thomistic Institute's new Project on Philosophy and the Thomistic Tradition. His main areas of research are metaphysics and anything adjacent thereto (the history of metaphysics, the methodology of metaphysics, etc.), with a special emphasis on the metaphysical thought of St.

Thomas Aquinas and its subsequent reception and interpretation. His publications include articles on metaphysics, philosophical anthropology, ethics, and (scholastic) economics. He is also an enthusiast of classical Indian philosophy.

“Why Do Some Thomists Scoff at Analytic Philosophy?”

Sometimes, Thomists have been known to scoff at the mention of analytic philosophy and analytic philosophers. More specifically, Thomists have been known to scoff at the idea of engaging in dialogue and conversation with them. The purpose of this talk is to explore why that is so, and to inquire if any of the reasons given for their skepticism toward dialogue are *good* reasons. To that end, I will present such reasons as arguments against the prospect of dialogue, and I will separate these arguments into two groups. The first section of the talk will look at what I call "impossibility arguments" - i.e., arguments to the effect that the sort of dialogue in question is, strictly speaking, impossible. The second section of the talk will look at what I call "impracticality arguments" - i.e., arguments to the effect that the relevant sort of dialogue is too impractical to be worth pursuing. In the last section of the talk, I will consider the merits and demerits of these arguments, and draw some lessons that Thomists (and perhaps also analytic philosophers) who are interested in dialogue might learn.



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