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### **MACINTYRE'S GILSONIAN PREFERENCE**

“No philosopher can know  
that he is a Thomist  
unless he also be an historian.”

- Étienne Gilson

Étienne Gilson claimed more people were Thomist because they were Catholic than became Catholic because they were first Thomist. However true, the latter class is usually more interesting. Instances include Mortimer Adler, Jacques Maritain, Walker Percy – and Alasdair MacIntyre.

In 1988 Alasdair MacIntyre had announced his preference for Thomism as a philosophical tradition after a famously long and varied trajectory. The trajectory included stretches as: an Oxford tutor in classics; a convinced Barthian; an analytic thinker co-publishing with Anthony Flew; a student of Hegel; a New Left Marxist; a student of medieval languages (e.g., Old Norse); a student of phenomenology and psychoanalysis, respectively; an anthropological sociologist influenced by Franz Steiner, Mary Douglas, and Evans-Pritchard; a neo-Aristotelian; and someone displaying a persistent interest in Wittgenstein. By the time he “landed” over two decades ago, however, MacIntyre was not a product of mere faddism. The themes MacIntyre presupposes in his work have occupied him throughout his professional career. Nor has he abandoned all the stages listed above (indeed he retains the last five synthetically).

A Thomist once remarked to me that it seemed, given his late arrival, MacIntyre was a “baby” as far as Thomism is concerned. Justly noted

or not, I pointed out MacIntyre is not a “baby” as far as philosophy is concerned. MacIntyre’s arrival to Thomism was a well considered one, an achievement unto itself.

According to Padgett and Wilkens, though “MacIntyre more often goes his own way,” still “his version of Thomism seems to be more in line with Gilson and Maritain” than with “any attempt to rephrase the Thomist position in terms of post-Kantian philosophy.”<sup>1</sup> While true enough regarding MacIntyre’s rejection of the transcendental approach, MacIntyre’s affinity to Étienne Gilson goes beyond this. It is not irrelevant that Gilson begins as a student of Bergson, and MacIntyre, in a sense, as a student of Hegel. Though Hegel does not seem to have influenced Bergson directly,<sup>2</sup> suspicions he might are natural given obvious parallelisms in their “progressive” historical accounts of thought.

In this article I argue that MacIntyre’s approach to Thomism is closest to Gilson’s perspective. Though MacIntyre’s interests are several, the following eleven are pertinent to the task at hand:

- 1) attention to intellectual genealogies in philosophy;
- 2) an account of the thirteenth century as an ideal age due to Aquinas’s synthesizing of Aristotle and Augustine;
- 3) the inexorability of conclusions following logically from premises;

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<sup>1</sup> They write that, “MacIntyre is committed to developing key philosophical positions of Aristotle and Thomas into the twenty-first century,” in Alan G. Padgett, Steve Wilkens, *Christianity & Western Thought: Journey into Postmodernity in the Twentieth Century* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, Volume 3), 254.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Kaufmann noted how Karl Popper had criticized what he called “the Hegelian Bergson,” and “assumes, without giving any evidence whatever, that Bergson [...] [Samuel] Alexander, and Whitehead were all interested in Hegel.” Kauffmann implicitly denies Bergson’s alleged Hegelianism; see *From Shakespeare to Existentialism: Studies in Poetry, Religion, and Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 101. G. William Barnard concurs. “Interestingly, there does not seem to be any evidence of Hegel’s influence on Bergson,” he writes in *Living Consciousness: The Metaphysical Vision of Henri Bergson* (New York: SUNY Press, 2011), 275. Barnard cites Milič Čapek as writing that when Bergson met the Hegelian Benedetto Croce, “Croce called attention to certain points common to Croce and Hegel [...] Bergson was apparently completely unaware of it [...] when Croce suggested that he read *Phenologie des Geistes* so he could see the process-like character of Hegel’s philosophy, Bergson [...] to Croce’s great amazement admitted he had never read Hegel!” (ibid.).

- 4) questions of first principles;
- 5) *esse* as the ultimate starting point for philosophizing;
- 6) the nature of embodied epistemology;
- 7) sensory realism as self-evidential (without need for recourse to an epistemological enterprise);
- 8) a complementary retention of the distinction between theological faith and philosophy;
- 9) the canalizing power of faith in prescribing and proscribing first principles for purposes of positive theoretical construction;
- 10) the weakening of twentieth century Thomism due to adopting the assumptions of rivals during the modern period;
- 11) the importance of induction of particulars in philosophizing.

These eleven points correspond – either causally, and/or by way of a prior affinity – with positions adopted by Gilson. This is no accident. Some legitimately might ask whether most of these points are uniquely “Gilsonian” rather than generically Thomist. While most admittedly are found in Thomas’s writings, Gilson turned these specifically into key themes of his own writing.<sup>3</sup> For reasons of space, I may examine only some of these points.

Regarding the first point, Desmond J. Fitzgerald has written,

Gilson is using his experience of the history of philosophy *to philosophize*. In works such as *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* and *Being and Some Philosophers*, ‘the experience of the history of philosophy is the starting point for philosophical reflection.’<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Referencing MacIntyre’s Thomistic turn, John Haldane has written that, “At one point MacIntyre speaks with admiration of Grabmann, Mandonnet, Gilson, Van Steenberghe and Weisheipl [...] though I share something of MacIntyre’s admiration for such men they could hardly be said to have produced a renaissance of Thomistic philosophy,” *Faithful Reason: Essays Catholic and Philosophical* (London: Psychology Press, 2004), 23. This statement comes as a shock. Notwithstanding the “admiration” we all hopefully bear Dr. Haldane, and he deserves it, the comment hints at just a shade of Brittanian insularity. Gilson’s impact on North America from the 1930’s-1960’s was great. It not only helped fuel a Thomist renaissance, but attracted curious attention outside Thomist circles for some decades as well.

<sup>4</sup> He continues, “In *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, Gilson uses the analogy of the physical scientist and the use of experiment. Just as the physical scientist sees worked out in his laboratory the consequences of certain hypotheses he has tested, so the student of the history of philosophy can see the consequences of the working out of certain premises with which a philosopher begins his philosophy.” Desmond J. Fitzgerald in the preface *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), x, emphasis added [also

MacIntyre views enquiry from a perspective molded by Giambattista Vico and R.G. Collingwood (as well as – very possibly – John Henry Newman) rather than Bergson. Yet this passage can only warm the cockles of MacIntyre’s post-Hegelian heart. The approach endorsed displays at least three characteristics:

- 1) taking the history of philosophy as a *starting point* of reflection;
- 2) a vision of history as a kind of laboratory within which the *consequences* of ideas are taken seriously (rather than merely tracing them back to their sources);<sup>5</sup>
- 3) an insistence on the logical chain connecting these consequences to a source’s first principles.

In 1970, MacIntyre wrote of how, for Hegel, it is by becoming conscious of their present mode of thought that men are able to critique and transcend it.<sup>6</sup> MacIntyre was never a thoroughgoing historicist (notwithstanding his initial acceptance of the label “historicist” in *After Virtue*).<sup>7</sup>

MacIntyre made the point of self-transcendence against Frankfurt School Marxist Herbert Marcuse. Marcuse had attacked formal logic – favoring instead Hegel’s negative “critical” dialectic given the latter’s power to *destabilize*, rather than preserve, an undesirable status quo. Marcuse implied that formal logic was invented to intimidate opponents of a given class structure. Sharing Marcuse’s affinity for Hegel, MacIntyre retorted that the “relation of Hegel’s logic to formal logic and mathematics is not one, in Hegel’s own view, of rivalry; there is no claim that formal

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citing Armand Maurer, “Gilson’s Use of History,” *Thomist Papers V* (1990): 26.] See too Gilson’s 1947 Aquinas Lecture entitled *History of Philosophy and Philosophy of Education* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press), from which the epigraph to this article is taken. Gilson writes, “Thus understood, the history [of philosophy] is to the philosopher what his laboratory is to the scientist; it particularly shows how the philosophers do not think as they wish, but as they can, for the interrelation of philosophical ideas is just as independent of us as are the laws of the physical world. A man is always free to choose his principles, but when he does he must face the consequences to the bitter end” (ibid.).

<sup>5</sup> See the early chapters of MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* (South Bend: Notre Dame Press, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Herbert Marcuse: An Exposition and a Polemic* (New York: Viking Press, 1970). MacIntyre intended the comment as an anti-relativist indictment of Herbert Marcuse, a father of our current “political correctness” movement. Marcuse argued that Hegel opposed “facts,” hastening to add, as a good Marxist, that what are presented as “facts” presuppose and support a status quo benefitting the hegemonic group.

<sup>7</sup> *After Virtue*, op. cit., 277.

reasoning is invalid or inapplicable.”<sup>8</sup> MacIntyre went further in claiming of Hegel that,

It is in the context of the growth of actual *knowledge* that the Notion takes on its life. Philosophy is thus in the end identical with science [i.e., *episteme*], for we cannot study the concepts of a given science independently of knowing what the *truths* of science are.<sup>9</sup>

MacIntyre went on to turn the entire point around on Marcuse. He noted that subversion of an undesirable state of affairs may require showing an interlocutor what she is *obliged* to conclude to – whether she wishes to or not – given premises she currently holds; and that this move requires formal logic.

Regarding this last point, Gilson, decades earlier, famously observed how, “Philosophers are free to lay down their own set of principles [...] any attempt on the part of a philosopher to shun the consequences of his own position is doomed to failure.”<sup>10</sup> For MacIntyre, this was precisely one strength of the analytic tradition. Namely that, though unable to offer any first principles of itself,<sup>11</sup> it is good for revealing what necessarily may follow from the premises one proposes.

While MacIntyre believed in proceeding organically and ‘systematically,’ all the while respecting formal logic, his appeals to Hegel flow also from his respect for Hegel’s attention to history as a starting point for philosophical reflection; not to mention the resulting intellectual genealogies this entailed. As noted above, as Bergson’s disciple, such was also Gilson’s approach. (Though, Gilson was more critical of Hegel.)<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 24. According to MacIntyre, Hegel never thought the laws of thought as such, including the laws of formal logic, were up for grabs. Marcuse admittedly had noted this, acknowledging the point for what he called Hegel’s “first” logic. See Marcuse’s *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 63.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 23, 30, emphases added.

<sup>10</sup> “What he himself declines to say will be said by his disciples, if he has any; if he has none, it may remain eternally unsaid; but it is there, and anybody going back to the same principles, be it several centuries later, will have to face the same conclusion [...]” Étienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, op. cit., 243.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Giovanna Borradori in *The American Philosopher* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 144-145.

<sup>12</sup> For Gilson on Hegel, see *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, Chapter 9, “The Modern Experiment.”

Francesca Aran Murphy relates that Gilson kept the photograph of an acquaintance, Abbé Lucien Paulet (killed in 1915 during the First World War), all his life. Murphy claims Paulet tried to overlay a historical “Bergsonian” approach upon his own scholasticism. This resulted in his suspension from seminary teaching.<sup>13</sup> Gilson literally leapt to his feet during the intermission at a lecture in which Bergson was denounced, to attack “a certain kind of Scholasticism” for its “lack of *historical sense*.”<sup>14</sup> Gilson was solicitous of the cumulative nature of philosophical achievement,<sup>15</sup> writing that, “Every science needs to be completed by a history [...] every history should be completed by a science.”<sup>16</sup>

Not only would MacIntyre reach the same conclusions, but apparently independently. In Gilson’s case, he confronted a would-be timeless presentation of Roman school positivist scholasticism. What MacIntyre confronted was Anglophone analytic philosophy.<sup>17</sup> What both their targets suffered from was a serious case of post-Cartesian physics envy, in which it was assumed philosophy could be taught as a science *in the same way* other sciences could be taught. Gilson’s 1947 Aquinas Lecture to Thomists reverberates with the same tones we later hear in MacIntyre addressing the American Philosophical Association. Gilson wrote,

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<sup>13</sup> Murphy claims, “The biographical fact which best explains Gilson’s intellectual development is what Paulet’s photograph represented to him [...] Paulet had conveyed to him a ‘strong dislike of manuals of philosophy’ that would stay with Étienne until his own death,” Francesca Aran Murphy, *Art and Intellect in the Philosophy of Étienne Gilson* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 32.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 294, emphasis added. For more on this point, see A.A. Maurer, “Gilson’s Use of History,” *Thomist Papers* 5 (1990): 25-48.

<sup>15</sup> *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (South Bend 1991), 426.

<sup>16</sup> *Théologie et histoire de la spiritualité*, 25, cited in Alex Yeung, *Imago Dei Creatoris: Étienne Gilson’s “Essay on the Interior Life” and Its Seminal Influence* (Rome: Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum, 2012), 287. Yeung writes that in, “In Gilson’s lecture ‘History of Philosophy and Philosophical Education’ (1947), Gilson strongly recommends for his students to not simply study philosophical essences – those which are presented in manuals and textbooks – but to engage concrete, existing philosophers.”

<sup>17</sup> MacIntyre noted how by “the mid-sixties I had come to recognize that a second weakness of analytic philosophy was [...] the divorce between its inquiries and the study of the history of philosophy,” and that analytic moral philosophy “could only be [...] understood if placed in historical context,” *The American Philosopher*, op. cit., 145.

I have heard some say that the goal of a truly philosophical education is, not to know what other men have thought in the past, but what a man should think now. And there are others who will say that the history of philosophy is but the common graveyard of dead philosophies, and that living philosophers should let the dead bury their dead [...].<sup>18</sup>

Gilson was aware of the pedagogical defect of throwing students into a stew of “intellectual history” courses, being told merely to “pick” among ideas without further ado. Philosophy in North America is often reduced to a heuristic device, a conversation not just without end, but without an end, in the Aristotelian sense of a goal existing beyond itself.<sup>19</sup> Such would become Richard Rorty's proposal.<sup>20</sup> Rorty was not this move-

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<sup>18</sup> John Searle once boasted of not knowing the history of philosophy. Husserl at least began his project apparently in ignorance of it, and ended rediscovering Cartesian solipsism. I was once surprised upon meeting a university professor who published various books on analytic philosophy from Oxford University Press yet acknowledged to an instructor of mine he knew little to no history of philosophy. Gilson makes another relevant point in *History of Philosophy and Philosophical Education*, op. cit., 24-26, “It is many centuries now since Cicero said that there is nothing so foolish and so vain which has not been said by some philosopher. Descartes, who hated history under all its forms, was fond of quoting this saying: whence many professors of philosophy conclude that teaching the history of philosophy amounts to nothing more than teaching a comprehensive collection of all possible errors. [While] to teach philosophy [...] should be nothing less than the teaching of philosophical truth [...] it might be useful to quote erroneous positions in order to refute them, but why should we invite a young and inexperienced mind to lose itself in such a forest of errors? If we know that Spinoza and Hegel were wrong, why should we let the young student read Spinoza and Hegel? We might as well feed him poison.”

I cite this passage because as late as the 1990's this was precisely the attitude I encountered among Roman school scholastics – while studying, significantly, in Rome. What is more: Cicero's quotation (attributed by one of my instructors to Descartes) was precisely what was quoted in order to warn us away from... Descartes. As one said: “Life is short.” His point was: why read anyone but Thomas? The papal encyclical *Fides et ratio*, in this case, is more accommodating of Gilson – and of MacIntyre.

<sup>19</sup> Gilson writes in *History of Philosophy and Philosophical Education*, op. cit., 26, “one thing at least is certain, [they claim] that the history of philosophy cannot but breed philosophical scepticism. Thus tossed without sail or wheel on a sea of conflicting opinions, a well-made mind can do but one thing with philosophy, and that is to give it up as a bad job. I have no intention of dismissing these objections as weak or irrelevant [...]. They all derive their strength from the same notion of philosophy, conceived as a ready-made science [...].”

<sup>20</sup> See *Philosophy as the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 318. Interestingly, Rorty shows Gilson a degree of respect as an historian – but, what is more he, implicitly, if briefly admits the Thomist position as one not as easily undermined as the Cartesianism Rorty ridicules in 49-50 (ibid.). As for MacIntyre in *Three Rival Versions*, 84, “The mind thus has to find within itself that which points it towards a source of intelligibility

ment's father, just its megaphone and articulator-in-chief. No one has been a more consistent critic of this approach than MacIntyre. He cites David Lewis as describing this vision as a "well worked out menu of theories," reducing philosophy to "a matter of opinion." MacIntyre condemns this version of pluralism which, far from being healthy, is better described as "a mélange of ill assorted fragments."<sup>21</sup> If one is to become conscious of inhabiting a substantive philosophical tradition – or of choosing to inhabit one – "from" which to engage and critique philosophical positions, Gilson insists one must become a kind of historian.<sup>22</sup> MacIntyre would agree.

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*beyond* itself, one which will provide what ostension by itself cannot [...] an apprehension of timeless standards, of forms [...] possible only in the light afforded by a source of intelligibility beyond the mind [...] we discover truth only insofar as we discover the conformity of particulars to the forms in relation to the which those particular become intelligible [...] apprehended only by the mind illuminated by God."

And again in *The Tasks of Philosophy*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 149, "In so far as a given soul moves successfully towards its successive intellectual goals in a teleologically ordered way, it moves toward completing itself by becoming formally identical with the objects of its knowledge, so that it is adequate to its objects, objects that are then no longer external to it, but rather complete it. So the mind in finding application for its concepts refers them beyond itself and themselves to what they conceptualize [...]. The mind, actualized in knowledge, responds to the object as the object is [...]."

<sup>21</sup> *After Virtue*, op. cit., 10. It is also for this reason MacIntyre is harder than one might expect on the Chicago-Columbia Great Books movement of Robert Maynard Hutchins, Mark van Doren, Leo Strauss, and Richard McKeon. It is not that MacIntyre believed their proposed course list should be left unutilized for a student's historical and critical thinking purposes. Rather, MacIntyre believes: 1) one never *fully* understands a text apart from the historical factors giving rise to those answers offered by the text; 2) there is such a thing as people reading particular texts without being humanly and emotionally mature enough to do so; 3) the matter of reading a text without being influenced by one's own interpretive tradition is left unaddressed; 4) the "canon" of books offered may be sub-optimal – for a "better" starter canon of authors from MacIntyre's perspective, see *God, Philosophy and Universities* (South Bend: Notre Dame, 2009). The phrase "mélange of ill-assorted fragments" actually seems to first have been used by University of Michigan professor Jesse Earl Thornton in *Science and Social Change* (Ayer Publishing, 1939), 113. For anyone who has followed MacIntyre, the context is worth noting. Thornton wrote: "the present atomistic condition of scientific learning and the restricted utilitarianism of their outlook will not be corrected by offering them a 'course in general science,' consisting of a mélange [sic] of ill-assorted fragments of scientific specialties [...] nor [...] by offering them [...] courses in the history of science, in which that history is violently detached from the history of development of man and the evolution of his institutions."

<sup>22</sup> Gilson writes in *History of Philosophy and Philosophical Education*, op. cit., 26-29, "It would be a very foolish thing indeed to introduce young minds to philosophy through the indiscriminate reading of texts which they cannot understand or [...] against which they are

MacIntyre and Gilson also converge in seeing faith as a canalizing power in pedagogical integration. Gilson points to the transformation of intelligence by faith. MacIntyre points principally to confessional identification, and the consequent vetoes of “authority” in both prescribing and proscribing first principles for the sake of actually getting somewhere in enquiry.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to faith, the acceptance of Thomism as an ideal starting point and synthesis of Aristotle and Augustine, correcting for the deficiencies of generalization of each, is a point MacIntyre consciously adopts from Gilson. Thus a robust school (Gilson's term) or “living tradition”<sup>24</sup> (MacIntyre's term) complements the faith it is informed by, offering additional first principles from which to engage in dialogue with other schools and traditions. Ralph McInerney (perhaps throwing this retrospective glance back in light of MacIntyre's point here) would go on to allege envy of Thomists in North America for decades prior to Vatican II for their relative coherence. Whatever else they fought over, Thomists shared first principles beyond common authors, texts and vocabulary, and thus could at least give the impression of ‘getting somewhere’ where others allegedly could not.<sup>25</sup>

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defenseless [...]. Yet [...] where do we find [Aquinas] if not in history? And how can we approach him, except through history? [...] After looking for help, someone reaches the conclusion that the best thing to do is apply to Thomas Aquinas [...]. But how does he know that he is a Thomist? [...] his first answer might be: ‘[...] because I am in agreement with [...] a book in which philosophy is taught *ad mentem Divi Thomae Aquinatis*’ [...], but then, how does he know that what his book describes as the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas is a faithful rendering of Thomas' own thought? The only way to make sure is to compare such a work with those of Thomas Aquinas himself. But just as soon as you undertake to do this, you find yourself engaged in straight historical work. True enough, history is not here your goal. What you ultimately want to know is truth, but since your [...] problem is to know if what Thomas Aquinas says is true, what you first must know is what Thomas Aquinas actually says.”

<sup>23</sup> The current inability to ‘get somewhere’ by other routes has been noted elsewhere. Rorty said the inability to agree was what prevented analytic thinkers from being famous for more than fifteen minutes.

<sup>24</sup> *After Virtue*, op. cit., 223.

<sup>25</sup> Gilson's account of the thirteenth century – and consequently that of MacIntyre, who sought to refine Gilson's thesis – has met some small resistance. The reader may decide if such resistance is warranted in Bonnie Kent, *The Virtues of the Will: The Transformation of Ethics in the Late Thirteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of Amer-

Though MacIntyre, in his own Aquinas Lecture, chose not to cite Gilson when proposing a genealogy of contemporary philosophy in light of Thomism, three years earlier he already had sided openly with “historical” Thomists such as Gilson in his Gifford Lectures.<sup>26</sup> In fact, he may have had Gilson’s *Unity of Philosophical Experience* and *God and Some Philosophers* in mind when he made his proposal.

Though both “historical,” neither man is an “historicist.” Each considers epistemic skepticism a non-starter and waste of time.<sup>27</sup> As far as the seriousness with which both men take sensory experience as one’s starting point, one suspects MacIntyre would no doubt show respect for aspects of Gilson’s *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*. Chapter seven of this work dovetails neatly with MacIntyre’s endorsement of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of bodily perception as the original ground of knowledge in MacIntyre’s own *Dependent Rational Animals*.<sup>28</sup> In stressing

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ica Press, 1995). The delineation of the Gilson-MacIntyre thesis as a target are made in Chapter 1, entitled “Heroes and Histories.” The book is an attempted refutation of the thesis that Aquinas is a unique theological synthesizer of Aristotle and Augustine in the high middle ages.

<sup>26</sup> Published as *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (South Bend: Notre Dame University Press, 1988).

<sup>27</sup> Gilson’s critique of Maritain’s “critical realism” is well known; e.g., see Francesca Aran Murphy’s chapter “Humanist Realism,” in *Art and Intellect in the Philosophy of Etienne Gilson*. For MacIntyre’s epistemic realism, see *The Tasks of Philosophy*, op. cit., 25, 29, 43. Following Gilson’s account he notes that Aristotle and Aquinas were engaged a “third person” epistemic account, not a first person epistemic account in the style of Descartes: “If the Thomist is faithful to the intentions of Aristotle and Aquinas, he or she will not be engaged, except perhaps incidentally, in an epistemological enterprise. The refutation of skepticism will appear to him or her as misguided an enterprise as it does to the Wittgensteinian. Generations of Thomists from Kleutgen onwards have, of course, taught us to think otherwise, and textbooks on epistemology have been notable among the standard impedimenta of NeoThomism” (ibid., 148).

<sup>28</sup> See *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago and LaSalle: Open Court, 2001), 6. Writing of Aristotelian commentators, MacIntyre would claim that: “They have underestimated the importance of the fact that our bodies are animal bodies [...] it was his reading not only of Aristotle, but also of Ibn Rushd’s commentary that led Aquinas to assert: ‘Since the soul is part of the body of a human being, the soul is not the whole human being and my soul is not I’” (*Commentary on Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians* XV, 1, 11; note also that Aquinas, unlike most moderns, often refers to nonhuman animals as ‘other animals’). This is a lesson that those of us who identify ourselves as contemporary Aristotelians may need to relearn, perhaps from those phenomenological investigations that enabled Merleau-Ponty also to conclude that I am my body.

the animal dimension of the human, one is reminded (albeit tangentially) of Gilson's *From Aristotle to Darwin & Back Again: A Journey in Final Causality, Species and Evolution*.<sup>29</sup> What each of these works demonstrates is that both men refused to be limited to historical commentary. Rather, they were actively engaged in addressing the human condition.

A final point would regard the importance of inducting concrete particulars for philosophy, as opposed to privileging merely abstract deduction in argumentation. In Gilson's case this is most famously illustrated by his attention to *esse* as realized in concrete instances, though he also references encounters with individual philosophers, understood as particulars.<sup>30</sup> MacIntyre spends time on Aristotle's account of *epagoge* (induction) in his own Aquinas Lecture, retrieving a point he had made decades earlier in *Against the Self Images of the Age: Essays on Ideology and Philosophy*,<sup>31</sup> wherein he argued that Freud's explanations lagged behind his observations; and that his explanations were truest when grounded on direct observation rather than on hypothesis.

Gilson went on to become perhaps the twentieth century's best known historian of metaphysics. MacIntyre became the twentieth century's best known historian of ethics. All the while both remained systematic thinkers in their own right.

Were they to acknowledge these titles, they might likely admit they could only have been the former, in part, because they were also the latter.

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<sup>29</sup> San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Gilson writes in *History of Philosophy and Philosophical Education*, op. cit., 20-21, "In the mind of a man born to the philosophical life, ideas do not merely follow one another, be it in logical sequence, as they do when we read them for the first time in a book; they are not simply associated by the process of reasoning and the demands of demonstration; they do not merely fall into place as so many pieces of a cleverly contrived puzzle, but one would rather say that they blend into an organic whole, quickened from within by a single life and able spontaneously to assimilate or reject the spiritual food offered to it, according to the laws of its own inner development."

In this Gilson clearly is influenced by a 1911 address of Bergson on this point, when he hastens to point out that a true philosopher's genealogy alone does not explain him, but rather the vision which grips him. Von Balthasar would make an identical point in his 1948 writing, "Retrieving the Tradition: The Task of Catholic Philosophy in Our Time," particularly on pages 162-163; reprinted in *Communio* 20 (1993, no. 1): 147-187 ([www.communio-icr.com/articles/PDF/balthasar20-1.pdf](http://www.communio-icr.com/articles/PDF/balthasar20-1.pdf), access: Aug 9, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> South Bend: Notre Dame University Press, 1989.

History and organic (if open-ended) systematics are no more mutually opposed for either man than they were for John Henry Newman. (Who proposed thinking both systematically and historically, though he never managed to systematize anything himself, playing the part more of a wildly fruitful seminal genius).

MacIntyre respects various of his Thomist predecessors from the twentieth century, including McInerney and Maritain. In his most recent work *God, Philosophy, and Universities*, MacIntyre expands this list to include non-Thomist scholastics – as well as non-scholastics – from previous centuries. Yet whenever MacIntyre expounds on Thomism in his weightier works, Gilson’s perspective seems to be everywhere implied. It is Gilson’s overall perspective which MacIntyre appears to find the most congenial and closest to his own.

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### **MACINTYRE’S GILSONIAN PREFERENCE**

#### **SUMMARY**

Alasdair MacIntyre arrived relatively ‘late’ to Thomism in his philosophical career. One of the many determining influences on his thought has been the Thomist Étienne Gilson. This article examines MacIntyre’s possible motives for embracing Gilson as someone apparently allowing him to identify as an “intellectually fulfilled” Thomist. The author claims that MacIntyre’s arrival to Thomism was a well considered one, an achievement unto itself.

**KEYWORDS:** Alasdair MacIntyre, Étienne Gilson, Thomism.